

**The Influence of some Ancient Philosophical
and Religious Traditions on the Soteriology of
Early Christianity**

by

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Declaration

I the undersigned hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

Signature



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THE INFLUENCE OF SOME ANCIENT RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS ON THE SOTERIOLOGY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Summary

When reading the Bible in an independent way, i.e., not through the lenses of any official Church dogma, one is amazed by the many voices that come through to us. Add to this variety the literary finds from Nag Hammadi, as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls, then the question now confronting many spiritual pilgrims is how it came about that these obviously diverse theologies, represented in the so-called Old and New Testaments, were moulded into only one “orthodox” result. In what way and to what degree were the many Christian groups different and distinctive from one another, as well as from other Jewish groups? Furthermore, what was the influence of other religions, Judaism, the Mysteries, Gnostics and Philosophers on the development, variety of groups and ultimately on the consolidation of “orthodox” soteriology?

THE INFLUENCE OF SOME ANCIENT RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS ON THE SOTERIOLOGY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

	PAGE
1. Stating the Problem	1
1.1 Cultural and Religious Backgrounds, the Main Cause of Variety	5
1.2 Hermeneutics and Complexity	9
2. Soteriology and Conceptual Analysis of Relevant Concepts	17
2.1 The Human Condition, Guilt and the Gods	19
2.2 Faith	22
2.3 Truth Criteria	25
2.4 Spirituality	26
2.5 Philosophy and Religion	29
2.6 Theories about God	34
3. An Introduction to Religion	39
3.1 The Functions and Purpose of Myth	43
3.1.1 The Hero	45
4. The Genealogy of Religion	49
4.1 Primal and Ancient Religions	50
4.2 The Eastern Religions	53
4.2.1 Hinduism and Lord Krishna	54
4.2.2 The Buddha and Buddhism	57
4.2.3 Zoroastrianism and Related Religions	64
4.3 The Philosophers and the Gods	67
4.3.1 The Predominantly Scientific Philosophers	70
4.3.1.1 Confucius	71
4.3.1.2 Aristotle	75
4.3.1.3 Socrates	80
4.3.2 The Predominately Metaphysical Philosophers	86

	PAGE
4.3.2.1 Plato	86
4.3.2.2. Stoicism	92
4.3.2.3 The Middle Platonists and Plotinus	95
4.3.2.4 Pythagoras	99
4.4 The Mystery Religions	104
4.4.1 Hermes Trismegistus	104
4.4.1.1. Symbolism	111
4.4.2 The Mysteries of Mithras	113
4.4.3 The Universal Strategy of the Mysteries	116
4.5 Apollonius of Tyana	120
4.6 Gnosis, Gnostics and Gnosticism	125
4.7 Judaism	135
4.7.1 Jewish Soteriology	147
4.7.2 David the son of God	150
4.7.3 Creative Messianic Expectations	160
4.7.4 The Way of Solomon.	162
4.8 Philo of Alexandria	171
4.9 Mysticism	173
 5. Critique of Present Day Christianity as Introduction to the Problem of Historicity	 175
 6. Jesus of Nazareth.	 184
6.1 Jesus and the Kingdom of God.	192
6.2 A Critical look at Important Moments in the Life of Jesus	195
6.3 Searching the Scriptures	197
6.4 A Summary, from Jesus to Christ	198
6.5 Jesus according to Thomas with inputs from John	202
6.6 The Spiritual Messages of the Aramaic Jesus	213
 7. The Jewish Jesus Movements	 220
 8. Paul the First “Christian” Theologian	 231
8.1 Paul and the Resurrected Christ	233
8.2 Paul on Salvation.	237
8.2.1 Sacrifice and Cults, to Metaphor and Spiritual Maturity.	238
8.2.2 An Old Model for Salvation Applied to a New Sacrifice	239
8.2.3 Wisdom’s Opinion on Sacrifices	241
8.2.4 Paul’s opinion on Sacrifices	247
8.3 Paul had many Arguments, but One Multilayered Message.	248

	PAGE
9. Revisiting the Main Soteriological Arguments in Time and Arguing for a More Varied and Inclusive View on Salvation in Early Christianity	255
9.1. God, Creation and Cosmos	256
9.2. The Human Dilemma	259
9.3. Another, Possible Interpretation of the Genesis Myth	260
9.4. The Process of Salvation	263
 Bibliography	 268

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1. STATING THE PROBLEM

To give meaning to life is an ageless and universal human quest. Life starts with a struggle for survival, followed by efforts to understand life and our place and tasks in the cosmos, culminating in personal and perhaps shared, meaningful philosophical answers. Alternatively, for many, culminating in “salvation”, which can be described as “the peace that passeth understanding” (Phil.4:7). Salvation can therefore be described as the ultimate goal in the process of human striving. However, many struggle to get beyond base one, for a variety of complex and mysterious reasons, which in itself represents one of the difficult questions about the Mysteries of Life. This early capitulation of the personal quest to meaning is also one of the main reasons for resorting to other people or groups for a shorter, easier route to meaning and salvation. This proverbial “easy way out” through an uncritically adopted “faith only” solution within a “canned” total package approach to salvation seems to ignore very important human modalities in our development towards a fully integrated, mature human being. Personal experiences suggest strongly that in the process of becoming fully mature, one will have to master the “this-worldly” questions to a fair degree of satisfaction in a predominantly rational modality of our humanness before the more advanced quest for spiritual development will be experienced as meaningful.

From the perspective of the virtually infinite human differences, coupled to a bewildering number of likely family and social influences in a global and virtual environment, personal and philosophical-religious variety should be the expected norm; not generalized universal orthodoxy.

Is this scenario valid only in our day and age? Did circumstances and humanity change that much from the time of Jesus or were there other factors in operation that made us believe that an extraordinarily unified orthodoxy

prevailed since his time? Personal spiritual discontent and the seemingly irrational dogmatic answers of the mainstream Christian churches do not seem to satisfy the modern spiritual seeker any more. However, did dogmatic, theological answers ever satisfy serious spiritual seekers? Furthermore, you do not have to be a theologian to notice that many different theologies are coming through to us from our current Bible, a fact which seems to be deliberately ignored by our present Christian theology in an effort to present a consensus theology. This thesis is essentially the provisional result of my own search to understand and to make sense of spirituality and religion in a broader inclusive context. In this process, I tried to get a grip on as many aspects that define and constitute our human spiritual experience as possible, while knowing that this is, from a human perspective, virtually impossible owing to complexity and interrelatedness. It also could lead to further confusion. Nevertheless, something within compels us, or seems to encourage us, to try, even if this effort could only lead to soliciting help from fellow seekers or facilitates higher insights. Then, at least our well doers would be able to know that help is needed and where it is needed.

What then is the meaning of this mysterious concept called salvation? The means by which "salvation" might be achieved seems to be closely related to the manner in which spiritual meaningfulness has being conceived and to what has been deemed to be the cause of man's need of it. Salvation as redemption from disease, misfortune and poverty also figures in religions, but is primarily part of ancient pre-scientific communities. Where it is present in modern religious systems, especially if it is posed as supernatural unilateral intervention, it is partly responsible for the science-religion controversy and therefore constitutes another philosophical issue.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (britannica.com/Salvation), the study of the relevant evidence shows the menace of death as the basic cause of soteriological concern and action. The idea that man finds himself in some dire situation is a complex issue. This dilemma, from which he seeks to be saved from, may or may not imply that superior forces are needed. This, again, depends on the cause and condition of his predicament, which could or

could not include the world and cosmos he lives in. The soteriological process and determinants, as well as the relevant concepts, are very important to clarify and analyse different variations of salvic theories that manifest in practice. Different individuals, groups and cultures will differ in their understanding of the human plight and their conceptualization of their preferred state of human well-being worth striving for in our present life and hereafter. Ideas of an ultimate fate of human existence and well-being may be linked to an idealised belief in an “afterlife” worth working for in the present life, or that a Saviour or Redeemer earned this immortal prize for us. In every variant of all possible belief systems, a specific concept of God, humankind and the cosmos will be part of the package.

Theology is said to be faith seeking understanding, according to medieval Anselm (Audi 1995:28). The critical question is whether our faith is a “first hand”, authentic one, as William James (1958:42) calls it; your own particular understanding from your own quest and from own experience, or a “second hand” one; a comprehensive belief system taken over, usually uncritically in the form of a specific religion or religious ideology. The difference is vast and meaningful. To arrive at a particular religion via science and driven by your own personal spirituality, through invoking philosophy and reasoning and verified by genuine experience. It should always be open to revision because of new experiences and insights, therefore based on your personal quest, and properly argued for. Then only can it be a living religion, uniquely in harmony with our present level of maturity and development. However, to accept the theological efforts of others uncritically, due to lack of own resources and effort, will normally stay at the level of a second hand belief system, not fully understood and integrated, with perhaps some emotional and social benefits, but without real intrinsic motivational value and normally therefore devoid of dynamic, inspired commitment.

From the perspective of modern, twenty-first century Christians, living in a scientifically, technologically and economically driven global village, to be coerced into accepting that there can be only one specific way to give meaning to the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, is just not on. One needs not be a

very learned or experienced theologian to see for yourself that there are many voices in the Bible, proclaiming different things about Jesus and despite the divinisation of the intentionally and specifically selected group of scriptures that eventually formed the present canon. Modern scholars (Mack 1995:2,6; Riley 1997:5,8; Clifton 1992:xii) attest to the prolific variety in opinion as to who Jesus was, and what Jesus' life meant to his different followers; differences that continued to manifest up to the third and fourth centuries after his death. Scholars, (Clifton 1992:xii; Riley 1997:7,10; Rubenstein 1999:9,14,188) now agree to a great extent that very few, if any, of his personal followers in the first century were Trinitarians or believed that he was God incarnated in a literal way while few, if any, of his disciples of Jewish descent saw his death as a preplanned and godly, once only, "blood sacrifice" for universal and final atonement for "believers" in this theological construct.

The tools of metaphysical understanding are myths and metaphors, which should not be presented as history and literal or factual evidence. When the coercive forces are brutal and spiritually insensitive, as was the case in the Early Christian era, people will publicly conform in fear of their lives but that will not alter their authentic personal spiritual convictions. As we will investigate, scholarly investigation attests to the fact that even up to and after the successful isolation and demise of the so-called heretical Christian groups at the hand of the victorious "orthodox" State Church under Constantine, variety was still present but only driven underground again.

In our journey into the past to look for the best possible version of truth and for specific answers, important questions need to be answered. Firstly, what is religion and how does it manifest in peoples lives? Secondly, how is it related to philosophy and spirituality? Thirdly, if we believe in God, what are our concepts of Him/Her/It and on whose authority did we come to this understanding? Fourthly, what is man and nature and how do they relate to God? Fifthly, what constitutes revelation and can it ever be verified objectively? In the sixth instance, what then was the real status and authority of the theology of Jesus, which everybody claims to be their foundation despite the frightening variety of Christian groups/churches and their

respective Christologies and soteriologies? In the seventh place, how and why did the Catholic or Orthodox Church become so powerful? What influences from the West, Middle East and Far East did it accommodate, what did it reject, and how did the status of its scriptures and dogma become so absolute and uncompromising. Lastly, what should be the real status of the Bible for Christians and other spiritual seekers? Should we all just accept the answer of Kuiper (1968:102), "The Bible teaches unmistakably that Christianity (which variant?) is the one and only true religion and that all others are essentially false." Can this type of judgmental and exclusivist theology still claim to be respectable in the light of new insights from possibly better but definitely more respectful and inclusive scholars of the Bible and related disciplines?

1.1 Cultural and Religious Backgrounds, the Main Cause of Variety

Almost all traditional theories of doctrinal development tend to assume that the history of Christian doctrinal development is a more or less unified process of continual, although sometimes erratic, growth and expansion from a more or less stable base of apostolic tradition, carried forward unerringly by the early Church Fathers. However, the more scientific and inclusive scholarship and historiography of our own time seem seriously to question this conceptions and according to modern historians (Riley 1997:99), even the integrity of Eusebius, as the main Church historian of Constantine and the early church, as well as the so-called "unity of command and teachings" of the pre-Constantian Church Fathers are in serious doubt. Instead, the new evidence coming from the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi finds, confirms the marvellous variety of Jewish and Christian spirituality. It is estimated that, apart from many other types of Christian literature, there were as many as eighty other "gospels" in circulation among the early Christians. Furthermore, Palestine and great parts of the Near Middle East had been dominated by Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome for most of the 600 years before Christ and could be described as truly cosmopolitan and in many ways analogous to our present global scenario. It is known from various other disciplines that the Middle East was host to virtually all religions and philosophies of the ancient known world. There were several Hindu and

Buddhist mission groups active and teaching in Alexandria during the first century. With brisk trade and constant military activity, even the philosophy of Confucius from China was known in the places of learning, while Aristotle owned copies of his writings. Through the travels of philosophers, traders and truth seekers such as Pythagoras, Plato and later Apollonius and many others, all philosophies of any worth were vigorously discussed throughout the Empire. It is just not possible that any reputable philosophic or religious leader could have been ignorant of the important current variants of philosophic-religious thought systems.

Doctrinal orthodoxy was not the major issue for early Christians, says Riley (1997:7). The two main Christian groups, that of the Jewish disciples of Jesus, and a broad group of gentile "Christians" worshipped together in most of the Jewish synagogues up to about 90 C.E. Even in Constantine's era, Athanasius of Alexandria, the great champion of the divinity of Jesus, was in his own lifetime five times alternatively declared orthodox or heretic by the vacillating 'orthodox' Church. Riley, with most other ancient and modern scholars, stresses the fact that education and the culture of the Empire were thoroughly steeped in the Greek classics, especially those of Homer and other Greek epics. In the Graeco-Roman world of Jesus' time, the popular tradition was steeped in many ancient legends and stories of the Graeco-Roman hero. Joseph Campbell (1949) calls this hero phenomenon "The Hero of a Thousand Faces", which is also the title of a book dedicated to this important and central tradition. According to Riley (1997:19), Jesus, to the gentiles at grass roots level, was represented as a new and compelling hero that one could admire and follow into a whole new life of caring community and transcendent hope.

Many individuals did not even accept the official interpretations of their dogmatically varied local spiritual leaders as the final answers. Working from numerous combinations of the eighty "gospels", they were also creating their own meaning based upon combining the popular and universal "mystery religions" with answers from Greek and Egyptian philosophy. The "Christian Mystery" groups combined Christianity with the "Mysteries". These neglected as well as important groups also require our attention. The Mysteries, as we

shall see later, were secret, philosophical-religious movements of great universal importance, which catered for a very broad spectrum of the population. Most outsiders thought of Christianity as a sort of mystery religion. This type of organisation was practical and sometimes desirable, for various reasons such as personal and group safety in a very volatile political-religious environment. Another important part of this spiritual “Christian potpourri” was the numerous Gnostic groups that wanted to understand their faith and believed in salvation by gnosis or special knowledge; faith was deemed only the first phase of the spiritual growth process.

There is more than enough evidence of a classic mystery religion plot in the narrative gospels. Definitive gnostic elements in the theologies of Jesus, Paul, Thomas, John, Origen and Clement of Alexandria, leave sufficient reason to believe that the canonical gospels had, at least in part, to serve for some groups as the so-called “outer mysteries” of a Christian Mystery. The gospels also functioned as important source documents for the gnostic myths. We will return to this theory later when we investigate the different theologies vested in the writings of these individuals.

The provisional point I want to make at this introductory stage is that the rich and complex cultural mix, which constituted the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus, had a definitive effect on the thoughts and thinking of the people of the day. If one adopts a perspective from a Christian point of view only and takes into consideration that the so-called canon, which constitutes our present Bible, consists of “carefully” selected books of many literary genres, including myths, legends, poetry, prophecy, specific and targeted theological argumentations, interpreted history and apocalyptic revelations of God’s “plans”, by a variety of authors in different epochs. These different writers, furthermore, also had their own agendas and theological orientations; therefore, the possibility of an intelligent, unitary “orthodox” systematic theology out of the whole Bible becomes seriously questionable. When one adds to these facts the priestly and scribal rewriting and editing over time and the lack of chronological ordering, especially of the New Testament writings, then a unifying objective theological result becomes virtually impossible.

Furthermore, for a truer and more inclusive perspective we should at least include the writings and theologies of those strands of Christianity that lost the battle against the Statal Christianity of Constantine. It seems that variety, not orthodoxy, is indeed the correct typology for Christianity in the first century. Finally, if we incorporate the controversial results of the first five hundred years of orthodox theological formulations, which tried to consolidate the different theologies into a very complex "universal" compromise, one can understand that this dogmatic result could be intelligible only to a very few participating theologians whose main mission was consolidation of conflicting theologies and therefore unity of command. Power relations seem to be at the heart of orthodox theological formulations. Foucault (1966:11) said, "Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produces and sustains it, and to the effects of power which it induces and which extends it; a regime of truth."

With this scenario as background and to be scrutinized further for historicity and relevancy, it would seem that if this proposed reality sketch is even partly substantiated, the Bible and especially the New Testament, is more a witness to colourful variety than a single unifying theology. Lastly, when one considers the other voices coming from the other approximately 76 gospels which were cancelled out and of which a number have mercifully reappeared from the new finds at Nag Hammadi, and from the Dead Sea scrolls as well as the proliferation of more neutral and inclusive scholarship that tries to unlock the complex symbolism of the philosophy and theology of the ancient secret societies for us, then the present Bible cannot be used as the only reliable source to reconstitute Early Christianity in a historical and reliable way. In my opinion, Burton Mack (1995:4) is fully correct in "pleading for the 'de-mythologizing' of the power and status ascribed to the Bible" and resulting in the fact that the history of Early Christianity needs to be re-written to a large extent.

1.2 Hermeneutics and Complexity

Religion and spirituality have always occupied a central position in human life. It seems that religion also performs the function of philosophy for the majority of people due to a conditioned belief that all you need to know is embodied in religion, or because of lack of interest and training resulting, again, from shortcomings in our education. In actual fact all people operate from the basis of partial knowledge plus an interdependent faith component that constitutes their philosophy of life. It is also conceded that all people start life in an utterly dependent way and are totally at the mercy of family and also the broader society in order to survive. Cultural coercion is therefore a fact of life and only after adolescence and in early adulthood do we even have the ability to think abstractly to such a degree that we might be able to start questioning our cultural traditions. In our quest, starting with physical survival and then on to knowledge, wisdom and meaning to the confrontation with our impending death and, therefore, our preoccupation with salvation, we go through many phases. These phases are well known to society and are expected and catered for by certain universal cultural-religious elements representing the cumulative cultural wisdom over time and space that is also indicative of the universality of the human growth processes and of certain traits as well as recognizable dispositions.

In creating a framework for the discussion of the history of human spirituality and religion, we need to draw from science as well as the vast pool of traditional wisdom to aid us in our life task of creating meaning and ultimately achieving peace of mind. We also need to specify and limit the aspects we deem important and relative to our ends. Because of its timeless importance, we have chosen as the central focal point the final aim of the human quest, salvation, and therefore soteriology, as our guiding principle and limiting concept. As mentioned before, salvation in itself is a complex concept that includes concepts of God, humanity, the world and cosmos we live in and which constitutes our "theory of faith"; a good descriptive term borrowed from Erasmus van Niekerk (1996:1).

This theory of faith can also, under certain conditions, be a scientific theory but cannot be a science, because its greater part, especially the elements that try to describe and define the essence of God and his “revealed” or intended plans, cannot be proven scientifically or be verified. It is therefore only a comprehensive theory. The best we can do is to scrutinize the various traditional wisdom systems and religions for clues that can point us to the nature of the essential characteristics of the concept of salvation from a human experiential perspective. We then have to test the results against the present state of scientific knowledge as well as the proper rules of logic to distinguish between the knowledge and belief elements of our theory of faith. A view from above, from the perspective of God, is not acceptable because God cannot be understood with a finite mind and also because revelation depends on a subjective, unique, personal experience which, also over time, did not prove to be universally helpful or even reliable to any great extent, except for those who have a vested interest in establishing a broader following. Not that one could not benefit from such information, but you must first establish whether such “knowledge” is meaningful to yourself, or represents a new spiritual insight, and then decide whether it could benefit a wider audience, while being aware that it is in no way verifiable and, therefore, has to be speculative by nature.

Human development is furthermore a complex and continuous process of which the level of maturity attainable is directly influenced by the level of cultural openness, scientific development, philosophical integration of knowledge and the level of acquired wisdom in a society. It is also influenced by the individual’s freedom to experiment and, therefore, by freedom from coercion and of thought and speech. This freedom is also influenced by our personal capabilities, education and personal dynamics. It is therefore evident that the traditional wisdom of a fundamentalistic or strong idealistic culture will influence the majority of people in a profound, if not definitive, way and that only the strongest and exceptionally talented individual escapes this social coercion to become totally individuated and therefore a full and integrated human being, subject only to internal authority. Due to this powerful hold of culture and religion on the individual, correct and unbiased interpretation of

the factors that influence the composite wisdom of the specific tradition and objective periodical re-interpretation of dogma, is of the utmost importance and in the interest of all except possible connivers. This implies that we must understand the dynamic forces that constitute proper hermeneutics, as well as the nature of complexity.

There are different methodological frameworks in hermeneutics, but let us first give a reasonable definition of hermeneutics and for this purpose I will use that of Audi (1995:324), "Hermeneutics, as the art and theory of interpretation, is part of the finite and situated character of all human knowledge. It emphasizes understanding as continuing a history tradition, as well as dialogical openness, in which prejudices are challenged and horizons broadened".

Coming back to methodologies I want firstly to discuss the one that is normally used by theologians, which to my mind is at the base of the problem of biased or predetermined interpretation - the one thing hermeneutics should avoid. The historical-grammatical method of interpreting scriptures uses the author's historical context, grammar and the analogy of scripture (*analogia scriptura*) to determine the meaning of the passage. Attention is drawn to two important aspects by Quilkin (2001:2); firstly, "that the author's context must control interpretation because the message was given to a specific audience, at a specific time, for a specific purpose". So far so good but then, secondly, "compare scripture with scripture for light on each passage, and discover the unity of its teaching", because this theologian states that "no Biblical passage can have two conflicting interpretations for it is impossible for God to contradict himself". This assumption is paraded as a fact, and becomes a proposition to the effect that there is but a single, unitary teaching throughout the Bible and, furthermore, that there can be no conflicting interpretations because it is God's own work and, therefore, the Bible is the literal infallible word of God. If this constitutes our hermeneutics you will be able, by selecting your paradigmatic verses carefully, to prove virtually anything from the Bible to impress undiscerning and uncritical people. This is what happens with fundamentalists, Biblicists and certain Bible cults with a specific pet bias,

for instance, those theologians that stereotype a complex theology like Paul's by declaring that he preached salvation through, an unqualified "faith alone" theology. Period.

It is of the utmost importance, for these reasons, that proper attention be given to hermeneutic principles and the nature and functions of certain literary genres, especially mythology, if we really want to understand other traditions and religions as well as our own tradition, which originated from complex origins, influenced by many different traditions. We will make use of a methodological framework that comprises three phases to analyse the different philosophical and religious traditions suspected of influencing the soteriology of early Christianity. These three phases are, firstly, a social-historical analysis; secondly, a formal or discursive analysis and, lastly, interpretation or re-interpretation.

Thompson (1995:21) emphasises that the "social-historical aspects of hermeneutics is a 'pre-interpreted domain' in which the process of understanding and interpretation takes place as a routine part of the everyday lives of the individuals who in part make up this domain. It is therefore important for us to rediscover this particular understanding that would have mediated the text in its own time." Gadamer's theory of understanding is helpful in this respect. For Gadamer, according to Linge (1976:314), "hermeneutics has its origin in breaches in intersubjectivity, this bridging of a picture, message or between the 'subjectivities' of a person in the present, from a person in the past, can only be complex, taking into account the extent, the breadth and depth of knowledge of the individual and culture as well as belief systems in place at the time". T.E. Hulne (Nineham 1976:312) expresses it as follows: "There are certain doctrines which for a particular period seem not to be doctrines, but inevitable categories of the human mind. Men do not look at them merely as correct opinion, for they have become so much part of the mind and lie so far back, that they are never really conscious of them at all. They do not see them any more, but other things are seen through them. It is these abstract things at the centre, these doctrines felt as facts, which are the source of all the other more material characteristics of a

period.” The historian R.G. Collingwood (Nineham 1976:312) speaks of every civilization being dominated by some “constellation of absolute presuppositions”, which determines how all types of questions, practical and theoretical, will be answered. This phenomenon is particularly true in religion where certain ideas, metaphors or explanations, can be eternalized as absolute facts and as the will of God, for instance: salvation is through the blood of Christ only; salvation through faith only; through Adam the whole of mankind is hopelessly doomed; Jesus died for our sins, implying there is no other reason for his early demise; if you pray and believe you will receive, as an unconditional maxim; if you believe, God will provide (no matter what); God is love, or just, or merciful, etc.

A further aspect of this phenomenon is brought out by Basil Wiley (Nineham 1976:312) who points out that different periods are dominated by different interests, and that these interests control not only the sort of questions asked but also the sort of answers that satisfy the people and the sort of explanation by which they are satisfied. By rooting their various practices in the will of the Gods, or the wisdom and experience of earlier generations, they provide assurances that the practices in question are in accordance with the nature of things and can be relied on to contribute to the well-being of the community. Examples are sacrifices, slavery and discriminatory practices.

Halbibavch (Nineham 1976:312) goes so far as to say that “society is in essence a memory because the corporate memory so largely controls the beliefs, institutions and practices of a society that it is impossible to understand, or participate in, the life and faith of a society apart from its memories and myths. That is to say, through socialization, in a thousand subtle ways, he will be encouraged or, more accurately, compelled not merely to learn and understand the institutions and meanings of his community, but to interiorise them and make them his own.”

We are still looking at the horizon or web of meaning of the world behind the text. If it is also important to note a further complication, that this horizon can be multilayered and multifaceted, as in fact, is believed of the history behind

the gospel narratives, as being so distant and pre-scientific that certain things do not even make sense and need total re-interpretation of their “essences”. Examples are illness interpreted as demonic possession, human sacrifice for atonement of sins and various miracles.

When we come to the text itself, we need to penetrate to the fundamental concern of the writer, what he means and what he claims. Despite the complexities discussed above, of cultural pressures and traditions, one must still bear in mind that socialization is not totally a one-sided affair. Human beings are not passive material and they participate in the process of social formation to a lesser or greater degree. It is therefore also important to take into consideration the writer’s intention, interest and character as well as his psychological mode and mood at the time of writing. It is the considered opinion of Erasmus van Niekerk (1996:3) that this “mode or mood factor is much more important in understanding human nature and therefore, the resultant communications that follow”. He wants to bring to our attention the complexity of human activities. There is no action that can be described as consisting of “pure” reason, “pure” faith, “pure” imagination, and “pure” emotion. In fact, this holds true for any other human descriptive category. Human activity is always a complex, interrelated affair. Van Niekerk (1996:8) likens his theory of differentiation to an extreme mechanistic metaphor of a “gigantic Oshkosh heavy vehicle’s gearbox fitted into a Mini Minor motorcar. The changing of the gears signifies the change to a specific, periodic dominant mode and mood of being.” You change to a specific gear because of a cluster of internal and external reasons, represented by the other “cooperative gears” in the gearbox. The important point is that although a dominant mode/mood is engaged, most of the many gears in the gearbox are always engaged and doing their thing, albeit in a different ratio to each other. “This complicated episodic emphasis of thinking, while the rest are involved; verbalizing while thinking is part of the rest, believing while thinking and verbalizing are part of the involved rest. The change to a next emphasis entails the loosening of the previous emphasis set-up and the setting up of the next involvement in a different ratio. Before one gets too fixated and too slotted in, fragments come loose and a new event takes us to another gear. If you furthermore couple this

differential complexity to the concept of phase of being, then the phrase of 'I believe' in its experiential, episodic understanding puts on a new dimension of change in tune with the implication that on the continuum of our life's journey, no two successive experiences could be exactly the same." There is just no such thing as pure thought, pure faith; as knowledge increases in a certain experiential field, the faith component will shrink, and vice versa. The fact is that no two of Paul's statements about law, faith and works could possibly have exactly the same meaning. They will all differ in a final or material way depending on the situation and his personal gearing at the stage that is also coupled to the understanding of his target audience. Therefore, Van Niekerk (1996:3) admits to a feeling of discomfort if one human field of experience is the constant basis of all other positions. "The remedy is to involve a differential philosophy to experiences by realizing and to concede to the reality of episodic changing of gears, in which a mode of experience or cluster of modes is only episodically filtered through another mode of experience or it is episodically locked into or Velcro-ed to another field of experience. When even God becomes the super point of human faith, little time and space is left for other experiential moments of faith in different gear ratios – rather like a whale in a private swimming pool who takes over the space and time of other swimmers in this field of experience." Another important implication and danger of one human experiential field that becomes a funnel for constructs of all other experiences, is that it also becomes the basis of ideological constructs in the hands of power mongers of all persuasions.

Yet another important consideration is the language used by the writer. Benjamin Lee Whorf, (Arbor 1965:313) maintains that language constitutes a sort of logic, a general frame of reference, and so moulds the thought of its habitual users. Sapir, (Arbor 1965:313) gives evidence that the vocabulary of a language reflects the physical and social environment of people. Ann Arbor says that if we were right in claiming that our culture influences vocabulary, then our vocabulary would influence other aspects of our thought as well. The "terms" taken up in vocabulary will influence notions and perceptions and therefore thoughts. These facts are especially important in the editing of

terminology, which was used in one culture, by later translations to suit present understanding. Despite many efforts of “corrective translations”, there are still obvious mystery religion terms in some of the New Testament books, especially in Paul’s earlier letters. A fresh translation by Schonfield (1998) who tried to go back to traditional terminology shows this phenomenon more clearly. If one takes into account that these letters have been copied many times before we arrive at the oldest extant manuscripts, this complicates and compounds the problem even further. We will also see that a freer, broader translation of Jesus’ words from Aramaic texts opens up a wonderful new world of meaning, much more in harmony with the mystical and gnostic strands of Christianity.

Lastly, the horizon in front of the text consists of the reader’s specific qualities plus the cultural horizon from which he operates. All previous personal aspects might influence him, plus the complication of his own predominant or periodic gearing and biases. If one could be balanced enough to realise your preferences and “gearing” and can also make allowances for those of the writer, a rich but variable and meaningful dialogue will be established. This “fusion of horizons”, in Gadamer’s terminology (Linge 1976:314), is the essential mechanism of understanding. For Gadamer the meaning of the text builds upon what he calls the “excess of meaning” that it finds in the text, and excess that goes beyond the author’s intention, explicit or implicit, of what he created. Every generation or Epoch will have to understand a text handed down to it in its own way, for it is subject to the whole of the tradition in which it has a material interest and in which it seeks to understand itself. “This understanding is not a reproductive procedure, but rather always a productive one. It suffices to say that one understands differently when one understands at all”, especially if the understanding of human periodical differentiation of mode and mood is added to the complexity represented in Gadamer’s scheme. Thus there is no canonical or final interpretation of a text or artwork; rather, they stand open to ever-new comprehensions and meanings.

Through a genuine desire to understand others, and a need to ground personal understanding in the best present truth and reality, one should be able to make

some progress. It is my intention to inquire as objectively as possible into what the Ancients thought of salvation, starting from the phase of nomadic cultures and primal religions with their subsequent views of man, God and the world. The second group of people we will have a look at will be the ancient pre-Christian, settled cultures with their religions and, lastly, the Early Christian period. Patterns of doctrinal development will be our main concern with special attention to soteriology. This I will try to do through a study of the historical evidence, traced as carefully as possible through time with interpreting help from the social sciences. Hopefully some common denominators can be found that could indicate a heritage and disposition towards spirituality. An important aspect of this search is to try and understand the motivators or reasons why certain beliefs took hold and how and why they developed, if indeed they did develop or change, as well as to try to understand these changes as well as possible. We will be taking a broad or multidisciplinary view, considering also the way in which beliefs were expressed and related to the broader cultural traditions and beliefs.

2. SOTERIOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF SOME RELEVANT CONCEPTS

As we want to trace the meaning of salvation in time, we will be looking at primal religions as well as pre-Christian traditions where different concepts and definitions may be applicable. A reasonable categorical divide at this stage is to look at the shared essences of salvation with a distinction between religions and traditions which do not need a mediator or substitutive saviour and those who do. All religions, even the so-called Primal religions and Buddhism, accept a non-material, otherworldly realm, although not all indulge in extensive metaphysical speculation as to the nature of it and the possible powers behind it. So, albeit vague and undefined in some, all the religions we will be looking into accept in principle a Higher Power or Being which most call God. The saviour, mediator types differ in respect to the degree of absoluteness in the mediators' function, ranging from goodwill, knowledge and help, to sacrifice of life in favour of their followers. In this last category

there are again two basic variations; one is that the death of the mediator will be helpful in their own saving effort when the saviour is resurrected in the spirit world, and the other is that the death of the saviour is the very instrument, vehicle or method of the saving process. For the first phase of our investigation covering the non-Christian religions, we will use a more general definition of salvation and when we discuss early Christianity, we will look at definitions that are better suited to accommodate this special kind of saving procedure.

The Hebrew and Greek words for “salvation” imply the ideas of deliverance, safety, preservation, healing and soundness, says Babcock (2002:2). It is clear that in its non-Christian and also early Jewish context there is a definite slant to help needed in this present life. The Latin word “salus” also means “health”, “safety” or “wellbeing” and the concept of salvation refers either to the process through which a person is brought from a condition of distress, to a condition of ultimate wellbeing, or to the state of ultimate wellbeing that is the result of that process. The meaning of the concept varies according to the different ways religious traditions understand the human plight and the ultimate state of human wellbeing. Ideas of salvation may or may not be linked to the figure of a saviour or redeemer or correlated with a concept of God. A prominent and virtually general conception also emphasizes justification – the process through which the individual, who is alienated from God or kin, is reconciled to family, society or God. These and other ideas of salvation rest therefore on the notion that the human condition is marked by fundamental forms of distress that prevent persons from attaining true and enduring wellbeing.

In discussing the various philosophies and religious traditions certain concepts will show up frequently and it will therefore be advantageous to discuss these concepts and meanings, as well as possible variants at this stage, to facilitate their understanding and possible meanings. The following concepts warrant our attention: human condition and guilt, faith, truth, spirituality, philosophy, religion God, afterlife, re-incarnation and apocalypse.

2.1 The Human Condition, Guilt and the Gods

Perhaps it is better to start more or less where we are now and then try to relate back to antiquity, for the reason that knowledge about our own condition apparently did not evolve as drastically as some would like to think. Profound insights into the human condition come to us through Egyptian, Chinese, Indian, Persian and Greek philosophers as early as two thousand years B.C.E. The problem in antiquity is not that they did not have a good grasp on the needed facts concerning mankind, but the distribution of knowledge was poor and mainly in the hands of the priests, nobility and philosophers. Social stratification was virtually flat, with only a few educated and powerful people on top of the masses who were desperately poor, ignorant and superstitious.

If we take a modern realistic view that people normally are instinctively equipped to survive and when still poor, one will learn and work hard to acquire adequate means, which of course could develop skewly into greed or materialism, or ideally mature naturally into the meaning-creating stage. Then, by considering our eventual death, most would like to extend meaning to an “afterlife”. Therefore, the normal succession of phases is survival, learning and adaptation, meaningfulness and then the attainment of salvation. If one is desperately poor, the sequence normally becomes survival, hopelessness and from there straight to seeking salvation, skipping the having and being stage and much of the meaning-creation stage.

It stands to reason that one’s view of life will also be influenced by the stage and phase in personal development, as well as one’s level of education, intelligence, social standing and available opportunities. It is therefore obvious that being poor and uneducated will make for a very different disposition than being materially self-sufficient and educated. Being a slave could therefore be even better than being destitute, without food or shelter. What is the source of human suffering? If we adopt Frankl’s (1988:73) “tragic triad” as an possible explanation, then “pain, guilt and death” are the main culprits. We all will experience pain to varying degrees, and death is an unpleasant fact for all.

Guilt is the one thing that has many facets to it and each facet needs different actions to soften its impact.

Being born helpless, primitive man was absolutely dependent on his family. Therefore, the individual's interest is subservient to that of the family, and the interests of the family to that of the tribe and the tribe's to that of the forefather spirits' and theirs, again, to that of God. If the individual or tribe violates the interests of the higher powers, the guilty party will have to suffer, repent and make reparations. This guilt is therefore "deserved" and you have to take responsibility for putting it right before you will be accepted back into the group. But, if you expect that your "wrongdoing", due to ignorance or superstition, will manifest in illness, disasters of nature or even unfriendly barbaric invasions, as a result of the wrath from higher powers, then you have the makings of a serious guilt problem that could destroy you psychologically, and eventually, physically. In a pre-scientific society, this was a major problem and certain religious remedies and rites were the only known solutions. It therefore makes sense that pre-scientific remedies of a religious nature call for careful re-interpretation.

What we need to understand is that spiritual insight was as diverse as the stratification of the population, according to levels of education and levels of empowerment. At least from the 6th century B.C.E., Middle Eastern philosophers already had a very different view of life, humankind, nature and the gods as opposed to the superstitious, "religious" one of the rural masses. They accepted that natural catastrophes should not have a personal guilt base and they accepted movement and change as inevitable laws of nature and the cosmos. On a personal level, they knew man had to overcome his own egotism and the fixation on material things to develop his spirituality and to live a meaningful and virtuous life, in order to be reunited with the Gods eventually. Therefore, even at this stage of scientific and cultural development there were many informed beliefs about the nature and merit of guilt. Jesus taught that human sufferings are not divine retribution for sin and should not be used to encourage excessive feelings of guilt. Sensitivity towards others and our wrong actions, however, is in order.

On a continuum, beliefs about sin and guilt range from a belief that the Gods fouled up at creation and were responsible for man's suffering, therefore, man must do his best in this broken world; through various degrees of co-responsibility with the Gods, to the view that God created everything perfect, except presumably mankind, because the mythical Adam and Eve fouled things up for all. Therefore, in this version, mankind is in a hopeless condition and cannot do anything good themselves and have to be "saved" from this serious, now permanent, mistake made by God himself, by means of a divine blood sacrifice. Even the other living creatures, animals and plants, it seems, now have to partake in death because of the human longing for knowledge, which was presumably against the divine will. Clearly, such logic belongs to the genre of myth and not to that of history or science. We will go into this matter more thoroughly later on.

To get around mortality, the different opinions on mankind, also seen on a continuum, starts with the argument that every person receives the Spirit of the Divine (the life-giving Spirit, partly manifested by their breath) at birth, is expected to discover and cultivate It to its full potential as an integral part of the growth and maturing process; to the view, at the other end, that only a selected few at a certain point in time, will receive the Spirit. This is to be accepted by the unfortunate others, either because this lucky group has a monopoly on divine connections or because they perform certain acts of obedience to the gods, or even through their passive, unconditional belief in a primitive sacrificial theological construct, while a terrible fate awaits those who are not part of that particular privileged group.

A further point needs to be mentioned at this stage. Because of social stratification, the overwhelming majority of people, in the time of Jesus, belonged to the poor, uneducated masses. Therefore, in virtually every country a two tier religious system was in operation. The national religion, supported by the state and run by state appointed priests, was geared for state functions and serving the religious needs of the State and the masses. Normally coupled to the State's religion, but sometimes separate, were the secret and spirituality

advanced societies, joined only by invitation or on recommendation, where advanced spiritual teaching was administered, and then only verbally and on an exclusive basis, intended for those that wanted more out of religion than pleasing and praising the gods in return for protection and favours. These so-called "Mysteries" integrated personal religious experience with the arcane philosophy of spiritual relatedness to Divinity, as well as personal spiritual responsibility, presented in symbolic, mythic lore that is only revealed to the initiates, as to hopefully affect a theosophical personalised spiritual system. These Mysteries were very popular all over the known world up to the time of Constantine when coordinated efforts were made to destroy them.

Suffice it to say that our view on humanity in ancient times should not be stereotyped by believing that all of them were uneducated and superstitious and ignoring the fact that brilliant people like Moses, David, Solomon, Zoroaster, Lao-tzu, Confucius, Buddha, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, Apollonius, Philo and many others lived before or concurrent with Jesus, had many followers of their own that exercised a profound influence over the whole of the known world. Despite the vast progress in scientific knowledge and therefore our knowledge of nature and of objects, our knowledge of spirituality, philosophy, ethics, moral responsibility and practices could well have deteriorated since then. The social and moral teachings and practises of Jesus is not taken very seriously in modern day Christianity and begs for an explanation.

2.2 Faith

Faith is indispensable and essential for the normal functioning of human beings. When we go to sleep at night, we have faith that the sun will rise again tomorrow, that we will have electricity to cook breakfast that the traffic lights will work, that my computer will function normally. We also hope, and to some degree have faith, that our bosses would give us a fair warning should we make mistakes and give us corrective training because we desperately need our job to survive in the global concrete jungle. In this, we have affirmed our faith in the laws of nature, technology and human nature.

You may believe that in the first fraction of the first second after the Big Bang and against overwhelming chances, “conditions happened to coincide” and relate to each other in such a marvellous but totally incomprehensive way that our cosmos was born. From where it developed according to the laws of physics and through “chance-evolution”, up to what we have today. Alternatively, you may prefer to believe, like Aristotle, that there is no reason to assume a start or an end in this never-ending cycle of creation through change. For him God is the prime mover or Unmoved Mover of the cosmos and his laws do the rest, while each creature must do its thing to the best of its created purpose and ability. On the other hand, you may want to believe that the cosmic cycles include a meta-cycle, where the total cosmos periodically ends in a fiery spectacle and then is recreated afresh, in a sort of Big Bang, as certain Stoic theorists, Zoroaster and some Jews and Christians believe, with only minor “scientific” variations in their theories. You may even choose to believe that one of the two creation stories in Genesis is the literally correct one, and that it is precisely how it all happened. Or, again, you can choose to believe, like Buddha, Confucius and Aristotle that we simply cannot know these things and that, therefore, this type of speculation only leads to endless posturing and bickering, resulting in animosity, while we should rather concentrate on ridding ourselves of our inflated egos and false perceptions of reality through education and reflection.

All of the abovementioned scenarios have two things in common. None of them can be conclusively proved or disproved by science and therefore they all belong to the category of metaphysical speculation. They are beliefs and part of our theory of faith to varying degrees. Although the standpoints of Buddha, Confucius and Aristotle seems more “scientific”, it still is a belief because they did not deny the reality or possibility of the Gods and a spiritual, non-material realm; nor did they state, or try to prove that the Gods could not be involved. They only stated a personal preference that is more practical that one should not invoke the unknowable powers while practising science in an effort to get a grip on everyday reality.

The real problem with faith shows itself in the concern of Erasmus van Niekerk (1996:6), when one mode of looking and explaining, one gear in the Oshkosh gearbox, becomes the predominant gear and the funnel through which everything else is forced. Then faith starts to get a life of its own and wants to dictate its specific mode of understanding to all the other modes of being. In our beliefs (the, then present, temporary primary gear) concerning nature, science and technology, our rational gear should be the main secondary gear, working in conjunction with our beliefs, while in that mode of being. When we come to the creation theories and beliefs the secondary gears range from deduced or inductive knowledge (Aristotle and the Big Bang theorists) to creative imagination (Genesis) to practical logic (Buddha), depending on your personal disposition and cultural, ideological coercion that informed the personal beliefs of the individual at that stage of his total development.

We can again visually represent the different degrees of faith on a continuum starting with faith, as an extension of knowledge, as extrapolating facts to expectations, when knowledge fails us and cannot inform us any further; as an intuitive type of knowledge, based partly on factual knowledge and partly on faith, in a supra logical framework. Next is faith from hope, which can also be varied from the perspective of the origins of the specific faith, i.e., while I work on my problem diligently and efficiently, I have high hopes, or faith in, a positive outcome; alternatively it can be a childish hope for the same outcome, based on expected supernatural intervention. Faith from religion also has two modalities, i.e., firstly, a faith based either on a "revelation" to somebody else and recorded in a "holy book", it is not open to reinterpretation and has to be accepted as is. You then have to subscribe to, or buy into the existing theory and explanations. Alternatively, you yourself had a profound, or unique personal religious experience, like the one Paul had on the road to Damascus, which influences your whole life in a definitive way. Lastly, there is faith from ignorance and superstition, which is normally based on the fear of "unknown powers" and often misused by others to create irrational, imaginative constructs with which they coerce or manipulate the gullible.

Once we fall prey to dogmatic beliefs such as everything is controlled by blind chance, or, my revelation is the only correct one to bring you to salvation, or that God will provide, no matter what I contribute. You are then stuck in one gear, which normally leads you to a dead end and frustration, causing many others to suffer because of your simplistic dogmatism. Healthy faith will have a reasonable element. It is more like a reasonable expectation or intuitive knowledge based on related facts and experience.

Faith that is fixed in non-negotiable presuppositions will eventually find itself out of date or out of step with reality and would then depend more and more on coercion to sustain itself. Human faith is in part intellectual and will accept propositions not yet known, or not yet clear, and which at least seem reasonable or originating from trustworthy people or institutions. It is a “gut feel” based on logic and knowledge that could be substantiated or strengthened by own experience or the testimonies of “reliable others”. If however, it rests solely on the testimonies of others without a rational, intellectual, experiential, imaginative or intuitive input from within, it is only a second-hand faith, and will not inspire or motivate the person to any worthwhile activity. It will be a faith void of internal motivation and of fruits, an uncritical adopted theory or theology and will not result in a living religion. This observation, in my opinion, represents the central problem of the sterility of most social, theoretical and dogmatic religions.

2.3 Truth Criteria

It is important that we understand the different uses of the word truth. Not all truths are created equal. The correspondence theory of truth starts with propositions that can be scientific facts, or beliefs, and if something is deduced in a logical way from these propositions then it is “true” provided that you accept the propositions. It is therefore dependent on coherence with the prepositions. The relational theory of truth starts with a definite description or set of discretionary relationships. If a second set of descriptions and relationships matches the first then it is said to be true; if it corresponds with the factual case, it is true. In the pragmatic theory of truth, “true” is what is

ultimately satisfying or productive to believe; it works; it is effective in my conduct of life. Propositions and beliefs can be true because they mediate, or marry, existing “truths” to new observations or experiences. True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, collaborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot (James: 1958: 97). The consensus theory of truth depends on the consent of all, under ideal, i.e., non-coercive and free, conversational conditions. It is not necessarily based on scientific or verifiable facts, it can be beliefs and/or personal experiences, that others are prepared to accept in the process of consensus forming and based on pragmatic truths.

The point is, there is no such thing, this side of life, as an “absolute truth”; it can only be an intellectual ideal or construct, that could not exist in conditions of incomplete knowledge like that of science, philosophy and religions. Therefore because nobody is omniscient and we do not yet have a full, unadulterated text of the “theory of everything” direct from God or from some supposedly super scientist, we will have to make do with the mentioned categories of truths as best as possible, while we must indeed strive, to attain the ideal of absolute Truth. It is also necessary that we realise that the mentioned categories of truth are not relative in themselves and that they must at least be rational and logical within their specific category, although the different categories differ from each other.

2.4 Spirituality

Because the word *spirituality* is used so variously, and it is very often related to religion, it is necessary to define the writer’s use of this term. We need to loosen this general term of a universal human trait from fixed connotations that imply that it is a synonym for religion, religious or religiosity. Spirituality has to do with an inner, experiential and intuitive aspect of people that relates to concepts like awe, wonder, piety, reverence, mystery, an unspecified longing, unconditional love and feelings of belonging and exuberance, as well as any possible combinations of these mentioned experiences. Since these feelings and experiences are inherent in all human beings it is my contention that we must steer clear of special cases and types of spirituality such as

paranormal phenomena and altered states of consciousness, as well as specific religions, when discussing normal human spirituality. The very basis of human spirituality lies in a complex of fundamental intuitive feelings, an awareness of mystery and longings, present in all but perhaps latent and suppressed, that proves to us intuitively that there must be more to this life than the physical, material and scientific aspects and suggests to most an unfathomable and marvellous design.

In its broader sense spirituality seems to involve the human awareness of the subtle aspects of existence of ultimate values, accompanied by awe and wonder of the mysteries of life, the universe and of the presence of a divine power. It includes also a feeling of interconnectedness with the rest of creation, and a strong urge to get a hold on this marvellous mystery and to find one's own place in it, as well as the meaning of it all.

The deepest aspects of the human spirit are unique, say Streng, (1985:115) and cannot be reduced to psychological, sociological, economic, chemical, or physical forces. It is also exhibited by unusual people who have liberated themselves from national, religious, racial, and class prejudices and from enslavement to honour, fame and pleasure, who seem to operate from a caring and deeply integrated self.

Albert Einstein (Lesikar 1999:3) said of spirituality, "It is very difficult to elucidate this cosmic spiritual feeling to anyone who is entirely without it.... The religious geniuses of all ages has been distinguished by this kind of religious (spiritual) feeling, which knows no dogma... In my view, it is the most important function of art and science, to awaken this feeling and keep it alive in those who are receptive to it." Robert Gerzon (1997:16) says it may seem surprising at first to contemplate such luminous figures as Moses, Buddha and Jesus in terms of anxiety, yet each of them was actually led to his spiritual understanding by the "sacred anxiety, present also in all of us."

Victor Frankl (1988:38) reports that the results of a survey of schoolchildren in Vienna brought to light that eighty per cent of the children already felt that

life was meaningless. He says that “both happiness and success are mere substitutes for fulfilment” and that is why the pleasure principle, as well as the will to power, is a mere derivative of the will to meaning. So, also, is self-actualization only an effect of meaning and fulfilment. Albert Einstein also related spirituality to the search for meaning, “The man who regards his life as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life.” If people cannot feel themselves part of a larger cosmic picture, if they are nothing more than a cosmic accident, then life becomes empty and the existential vacuum phenomenon becomes obvious in materialistic pursuits and power play, pre-occupation with pleasure, sex and entertainment in an effort not to face this lack of personal purpose and spirituality, says Frankl (1988:50). For Ellison and Smith (1991:37), the spirit is what enables and motivates us. It stimulates us to search for the supernatural and search for a meaning that transcends everyday life. It is the spirit that synthesizes the total personality and provides some sense, energizing direction and order. Spirit is used here as the intangible or invisible aspects of human nature consisting specifically of the facilities of intellect, agency (or will) and affection or emotion.

“Meaning and spirituality are also personal in that no two persons share exactly the same genetics or personal experiences. People have to decide for themselves whether they are going to base their responsibility to life on their own consciousness or on society, nature, God or a combination of them. Meaning cannot be given arbitrarily but must be found responsibly and sought for conscientiously,” says Frankl (1988: 63).

Spirit and conscience work together with faith, reason and emotions to help us formulate our value system. This complex internal relationship, together with knowledge and past experiences, inform our intuitive capacity. These inner experiences are our guiding light in our search for our own truth and meaning. Burton Mack (1996:106) felt that “the most comprehensive rendering of ‘Logos’, is ‘Meaning’ and responds most directly to feelings of alienation and lost-ness, both as they are known in the contemporary world and as they were experienced at the time when Gnosticism made its appeal.” By paraphrasing the prologue to the Gospel of John and substituting Logos with Meaning, the

result is both very thought provoking and interesting. Herewith a part of that paraphrased text: "Fundamental to everything is Meaning. It is closely connected with what we call God, and indeed Meaning and God are virtually identical. To say that God was in the beginning is to say that Meaning was in the beginning. All things were made meaningful, and there was nothing made that was meaningless. Life is the drive toward Meaning, and life has emerged into self-conscious humanity, as the (finite) bearer and recipient of Meaning. And Meaning shines out through the threat of absurdity, for absurdity has not overwhelmed it. Every human being has a share in Meaning, whose true light was coming into the world. Meaning was there in the world and embodying itself into the world, yet the world has not recognized the Meaning, and even humanity, the bearer of Meaning, has rejected it."

The last aspect in our spiritual quest for meaning is that there seems to be a general consensus that true human spirituality is fulfilled in an active life of service and work that also transcends our own personal interests. Spirituality is what open us up to connection and relationships with our inner self, others, nature and the cosmos and with whatever else the individual may take as the ultimate Power; Cosmic Conscience, the Infinite, the Unknowable or God. This relationship helps us to define our own essence and helps us to take up the challenge of life in a meaningful way. Our spirituality will also inform our philosophy of life, which could culminate in our own metaphysical or speculative spiritual philosophy or theory of faith. Alternatively, one could join a religion, which satisfies this need, depending on our personal insights, temperament and stage of development. As to the reality of economic survival and the plight of the spiritual person where the slogan for competitiveness and success is that "nice guys finish last" one would do well to remember that the spiritually orientated people should run the race differently, encouraging all to complete and to encourage synergy instead of egoistic competitiveness.

2.5 Philosophy and Religion

The reason why these two concepts are grouped together is that both are better understood in relation to each other. Human life depends literally and

figuratively on the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom, where knowledge of the functional type relates more to our physical survival, while wisdom may have one leg in this life and in meaningful relationships and the other in a hopefully more permanent spiritual reality. Albert Einstein once commented that a person who asks after the meaning of life has already started on his spiritual and religious quest. At a fundamental level, we could say that philosophy aims at personal wellbeing, mental health and a meaningful life while religion concentrates primarily on God and salvation. Religion has much in common with philosophy, although there are very crucial differences that we need to understand, we have to clear these concepts from the woolliness that normally clouds them.

As an opening remark in this discussion, one should notice that philosophy normally works from science and knowledge, using reason and logic as instruments of thought, while avoiding, as far as possible, beliefs, revelations and metaphysical speculation. Religion, on the other hand, normally starts with revelations and beliefs and will sometime invoke science and reason to explain or defend such beliefs, if felt necessary. In extreme positions, if the Scriptures and science are at loggerheads, the religious leaders will ignore science and will uphold the scriptural "truths", while the philosopher will back the scientific argument. The most fundamental difference is that for the philosopher, as for the scientist, knowledge is always provisional and open to correction or improvement, while for most traditionally religious people their Sacred Scriptures are constituted of selected writings, which they regard as infallible. In the case of the Bible it is then called the "canon" or measure, which is further believed to be divinely inspired and inerrant, and to contain all that is needed to know. A super, unchangeable handbook of life and afterlife, not open for discussion or revision, seemingly understandable only to particularly trained theologians coming from certain seminaries.

Philosophy on the other hand, is aimed at dealing with the fundamental uncertainties of life on the level of thought, facts and logic. If human life is seen as a meaningful project that confronts each human being, then we need to know the rules and choose our game plan. Our life policy is derived from our

philosophy of life and functions to guide our decisions and actions. Socrates said that “An unexamined life is not worth living”, encouraging us to know ourselves in our search for truth, while Aristotle said: “An unplanned life is not worth examining”, reminding us that knowledge must be ordered and correlated into a meaningful plan to be of any use. It was the ideal of many philosophers and scientists over the ages to rid humanity of the crippling and dehumanizing effect of ignorance and superstition. The abdication of reason in favour of blind obedience to the gods, which was mostly encouraged to the sole benefit of the priestly management of the oldest and most powerful business in history, was and still is, not in the interest of human intellectual and spiritual development.

Science and philosophy ask different questions while they both look for truth, through fact and reason. Science does empirical research from controlled observation and experimentation while philosophy uses this result to ask its own questions. Science inquires into the “law”, the “cause” and the “facts” while philosophy asks “why”, questioning the reasons and “meaning”. Philosophy does this by the methodology of independent investigation, a theoretical stance and rational justification while remaining open for revision or correction. None of these principles is applicable to religion from within its own ranks and when doing theology. Religions start with a specific body of beliefs, the fundamental stance is that of a faithful believer, rational justification is not the departure point, divine revelation is, and furthermore it is not open for revision to any significant extent.

Everybody has a philosophy. It may be crude, ad hoc, borrowed for the moment or well informed, rational and consequent. Everybody has a spiritual component that will influence his way of looking at himself, others, the world and, if he chooses, the supra natural. The point is that atheists and agnostics may not have an official religion but their spirituality will be reflected in their philosophy of life. In a study of 171 509 American students in the sixties they were asked to describe their principal reasons for attending university. Nearly seventy per cent of them answered, “To develop a meaningful philosophy of

life" (Frankl 1988: 63). I have serious doubts whether they found what they wanted.

According to Branden (1977:39), "Reason is the facility that makes distinctions and connections, that abstracts and unites, that differentiates and integrates. Reason generates general principles from concrete fact and relates new knowledge or information to our existing context of knowledge. Its guide is the law of non-contradiction." He further characterizes reason as the "highest manifestation of the integrative function inherent in life itself. Reason is the principle of integration made conscious. The quest of reason – this can hardly be stated often enough – is for the non-contradictory integration of experience." He further makes this very interesting and thoughtful statement: "Whoever continually strives to achieve a clearer and clearer vision of reality and his proper place in it – whoever is pulled forward by a passion for clarity – is, to that extent, leading a spiritual life."

Van Niekerk (1988:155) proposes, "that theology be seen as a perspective of faith, from which one can speak about God, humanity and the world. This is an inclusive, comprehensive stance where faith should be seen as the spectacles through which one looks to be able to speak about God, humanity, and the world. It is important that we acknowledge the fact that faith is something essentially human". Van Niekerk (1988:128), furthermore, reminds us that it is human beings who believe, not God or the Spirit. "As a theoretical perspective of faith, theology is pertinently concerned with such things as the church as a social structure, the sacraments, various creeds, spirituality and the church's role in society. It is concerned with formulating a functional image of God, humanity and the world in terms of faith." A more comprehensive definition of religion would be, according to van Niekerk (1988:129), "an indication of an overall system of ideas, concepts, values and experiences; while the term faith or belief functions as a specific and particular segment or perspective of the religious ideological whole. Religion is directed at 'salvation', ultimate meaning and destination, the supreme good."

The medieval philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas in fact said explicitly “faith is a virtue added to the intellect” and should not be irrational because God is not irrational. “Thomas holds that it is impossible for those things revealed to us by God through faith to be opposed to those we can discover by using reason. For then one or the other would have to be false; and since both come to us from God, it is not possible...” (Audi 1995:31) Provided, of course that the outcome is the result of unbiased and logical reasoning free from any restraints and, also, from mutually acceptable premises.

From a human perspective personal spiritual awareness and experience could, to some, be the most important facet of their religion, while others would rather prefer a more social and integrative religion, which will also function as an adopted philosophy of life. A specific religion normally starts from the exceptional spiritual capabilities of a founder that resulted from a personal sacred experience, which is then later generalized into a social religion. Once the religion is formalized, institutional power, struggles become part of the dynamics. From now on, you either accepts the total package, or you leave on own account, or are thrown out. It is very important that we understand the stages in the development of a religion because of these different phases.

The development of the Jewish National religion, based on Middle Eastern mythology, developed into various strains of new “Christian” mystical religions. This developing process could accommodate changes so great that they could be virtually different religions in their different stages, while in other phases it becomes new religions in progress when one looks back in history. The religious orientation of Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon and Job differs in important aspects from one another, while the religion of Jesus differs from theirs and also from that of Paul, the synoptic writers and John, while perhaps less from that of Matthew and James. Depending on whether your point of departure is the exoteric, “outer”, or esoteric, “inner”, mysteries, perhaps Jesus’ spirituality was more in tune with that of Thomas or Mary Magdalene than with the heirs of the so-called “orthodox” spirituality.

2.6 Theories about God

Starting with the three basic categories of theorists about God, the atheist, the agnostic and the believer, all three have a definite point of departure. As mentioned previously, even the atheist, who says that he does not believe in God, is a believer in his own way, while many are branded as atheists just because they do not subscribe to a specific religious society or denomination. If we should properly inquire into the real motivation for atheistic opinions, it is my contention that most of them would not be classified as classical atheists, but they would reject the dominant Christian concepts about God, science and salvation. The second major problem seems to be the illogical, supernatural and interventional claims and expectations of conventional religions. Thirdly, the passive acceptance of the so-called “will of God” for problems they either do not know how to solve or don’t want to solve, resulting in a sort of symbiotic co-dependency between man and God where the one praises and prays, while the other must deliver the goods, or even organise our salvation. They could be more accurately described as being reactionary atheists, knowing that the conventional brands of religion and their interfering gods are not acceptable, while they have not worked out a viable alternative for themselves. The baggage of conventional religion becomes excessive.

Agnostics are people who doubt the reality of God and could even be the dominant group if you take into consideration that the largest group in Western societies profess that they believe, but do not actively belong to any religious organization. Another group amongst “official” church members, whose religion functions on dogmatic conditioned rhetoric and who thrives on social church activities, manage their religion like a social club, rather than a lived religion. Lastly, there is the other large group of church goers who go through all their religions’ formalities and participate in its rites because it is a sort of insurance against calamities at a personal and national level, a trade-off in case there is a God as “all the others” profess, or because it is supposed to be the “right thing to do” in a decent society. These last two groups are technically also agnostics because their lack of serious commitment testifies to

their uncertainty. This was definitely the case with the Roman State Religion, but here also the Emperor expected that good citizens must participate as an act of religious patriotism. Because nobody was totally sure which or who's God would eventually be victorious you kept your options open by practising tolerance to other religions and their Gods, so long as every citizen respected and attended the national religious occasions.

Real matured religion was regarded by the best of the philosophers, gnostics and mystics as exemplified by those who are driven by an inner intuitive knowledge, based in spiritual longing and awareness, not totally devoid of rationality, enriched by experience, based on a contemplation the mysteries of reality, thereby practising a personalised version of one of the broader religious traditions. Alternatively, those who practise a totally personalised religion in the above mode, but sharing only in certain of the general traits of a specific spiritual system, or even accepting spiritual clues from more diverse or distant traditions and trying it for size before accepting its wisdom. The important aspect is the quality of spirituality, which at the level of the inner, esoteric, personal level is very much the same for all great traditions; not the particulars of the exoteric outer beliefs, myths, legends and gospels, which are only the group specific carriers of the universal truths.

Since statements concerning God are the most basic method of identification of particular belief-systems, it would be to the advantage of our project of historical critical analysis to look at certain typical categories of god-talk. Divine reality is disputable and improvable by science and logic and we cannot verify so-called divine acts or revelations with reference to their object, God, but we are somehow driven by the spiritual element in our human nature to try to understand and to explain the unknowable and the mysteries of life and the cosmos. God by his very nature is beyond human conception and any description of the divine represents exactly our human effort to understand this Infinite indescribable, composite, complex mystery in finite emotive terms.

The most tragic manifestation of human arrogance and foolishness is to objectify a second-hand religious belief system, taken over uncritically, to

such an extent as to claim that your group possesses “the only Truth” about God and on top of it, the only inspired scriptures and revelations as per Kuiper. “We” are the only group that carries God’s eternal spirit, and we have the only true Representative of this unknowable God in our camp working for us only. The totally unfathomable, loving and just Creator of everybody, who “must” punish his own Son for the sins of mankind, because “divine blood only” would be acceptable, because “it is written” that he cannot bear to leave sin unpunished; justice demands retributive actions, it will be wrong according to “His laws” to forgive sins just by “grace alone”. He, somehow, has chosen “one group only” for salvation; those who “believe” that this, “once only”, “divine blood sacrifice only” was the “only remedy” for salvation and that absolutely no input from our side is needed, or would even be tolerated, because then salvation would not be “grace alone”. This method of salvation is called, variously, as saved by “divine blood alone” but because you have to believe in this “once only divine sacrifice” it is also called saved by “faith alone”. With this faith in a substitutive sacrifice, you gain His grace, so by “believing only” in “divine sacrifice” you gain salvation by “grace alone”. However, you must remember that it is “only by believing” in this “absolutely necessary divine blood sacrifice”, and thereby upholding absolute justice, that you can receive grace, and be saved by “grace alone”. You not only gain instant and irrevocable salvation, but also attain instant total human maturity, because nothing else is ever demanded of you any further, because you must understand that your salvation must be by “grace alone”; you have arrived! The rest of humanity, brought up in various different cultures and religious traditions, who anxiously battle with the mysteries of life and death and who try to live a good and productive life of contemplation and critical self-improvement while aching for spiritual union with their Creator, but do not believe in the morality or logic of a substitutive sacrifice or do not even know about it, are unfortunately all on their way to hell; anyhow, how dare the rest of you question this wise and compassionate divine decision? This type of “divine” logic and morality is no longer acceptable to many of us. We will have to go back to the proverbial drawing board of Early Christianity to investigate the truth claims of “orthodox” Christianity. Many that were

brought up in this kind of Christianity will echo John Shelby Spong's (1998) book title: "Why Christianity must Change or Die"

It will be prudent for all of us to remain humble in our endeavours to understand God and to realise that our concepts about God are ours, not God's, knowing that the only One that really knows the answers is God Himself. Let us leave the truth statements about God and His plans for the future; who will be saved and who will not make it, as well as judging other religions, to divine Wisdom.

In our investigation into the concepts of God, we will start with the presumably older and more ancient ideas. Animism, according to Runes (1983: 28), is defined as, "The view that souls are attached to all things as their inner principle of spontaneity or activity, or as their dwellers; it is the doctrine that nature is inhabited by various grades of spirits."

Spiritualism reflects the characteristics of animism, but adds an element of communicability in that ancestral or other spirits can communicate with humans. Another term related to animism is hylozoism, which refers to "the conception of nature as alive or animate, of reality as alive" (Runes 1983: 149). Consistent with these definitions and closely related to the concept of immanence, all nature is viewed as alive and imbued with spiritual energy. Communication is said to be possible between humans and various aspects, or spirits of the animated natural world. Interconnectedness is accepted as a fact of life and believers see themselves as part of the whole. This is actually a very sensitive and considerate spirituality that could even be part of another belief system, as was the case with many religious sages - for instance St. Francis of Assisi - as well as other Christian mystics and which is becoming increasingly popular again. Others are my sisters and brothers, whatever their race, colour, gender, age, nationality, religion or lifestyle. "The earth is my mother and the sun is my father, I am part of this large family of Nature, not the master of it. I have my own special part to play and I seek to play that part to the best of my ability. I seek to live in harmony with others in the family of nature, treating others with respect, not abuse." (Fox 1990:44)

Theism indicates a belief in at least one god, then it is called monotheism; but there may be many gods, each with its own territory or functions in the cosmos, then it is called polytheism. How you conceptualize God, depends on your tradition plus private preferences, and can range from an anthropomorphic model to a very vague abstract concept.

Deism is the doctrine or creed of a deist who is defined as, “one who believes in the existence of a God or a supreme being but denies “revealed” religion, basing his belief on the light of nature and reason” (Webster Encyclopaedia 1941). A good example of such a belief is that of Albert Einstein who said, “My religion consists of a humble admonition of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals him in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction, of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God.” (Deist website 2001)

Pantheism represents the belief that everything that exists is God. The totality of reality is a part of God. The allied concept of panentheism stresses that God is in all things but also much more than that. The practical implication is that God is in us also, but also that the totality of God is much more than the component parts. This is the spirituality and the concept of God that Thomas ascribed as the one that Jesus favoured in the Gospel of Thomas.

It is obvious if one contemplates the different views of God that you realise that several of them are usually part of a tradition, or of an individual's view of God. It is furthermore important to take into account the level of development of the individual's consciousness when one shares these concepts of God with fellow seekers. Frankl (1988:41) said that the Freudian principle of pleasure is the guiding principle of the small child, the Adlerian power principle is that of the adolescent, and the will to meaning is the guiding principle of the mature adult. To these insights, we must add that the principal mode of caring for a small child starts with nurturing, then follows discipline unto self-discipline, onto sympathetic wise guiding towards his/her own unique meaning in life. It is obvious from this parental model that the concept

of God might also change in time from the nurturing mother to the stricter discipline of the father to the hopefully, wiser and loving guidance of the grandparents, in aid of the correct balance.

From the range of concepts of God there seems to me that one is missing, that one that should represent the end of our spiritual journey. The Gnostics and the Mysteries had various terms for it such as christening, the sacred marriage or sacred union, while Paul called it the Christ spirit that now must live in us, or just Christ in us. Jesus used the concept of “the two” that must become one, he and the Father is one. Buddha called it illuminative condition of Unity. This spiritual merging and taking over of the leadership by the Holy Spirit makes us the real sons and daughters of God. This godly humanness has to be represented as another concept of God, as that one whereby we become like Jesus, God’s full and empowered representative in this world. Of course, it is an ideal with a very rare occurrence but, nonetheless, it should be the goal of all spiritual people and traditions. Confucius said of this human condition, that of all types of people the highest order of people is represented by the sage, who is the unadulterated good and wise man; he said that he had not met one yet, but he was sure there must have been some of them in the past! Wise people over the ages believed that full human spiritual maturity should eventually result in a “Sage”, a “Christ”, or the “heavenly Adam” exhibiting the “image and likeness of God”, but in this life already. It is also known that many of them felt that it was the intention of God to equip us all for this possibility so that we must develop into a sage with the help and guidance of the Spirit within.

3. AN INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION

If we are to understand the religions of others we will have to understand the context and the frame of reference within which they operate. Due to the nature of religion, which comprises a total strategy to guide man through life, his relationships with others and the world, plus an appropriate strategy toward the gods, which will again influence his total this-worldly strategy; it is

normally a mixture of revelation, myth, philosophy and praxis. From man's point of view, the most basic reality of his existential uncertainty will be his instinctive bias towards own survival. This is the logic behind Pascal's wager, a clear warning that it is a safer policy to anticipate a just Designer or Creator, in case justice here or perhaps hereafter will be demanded, rather than to live recklessly. One, furthermore, must consider the short earthly life cycle compared to the possibility of an eternal life hereafter.

Joseph Campbell (1996: audio) pointed out that ancient religions could be typified into two main classes. Religions of address, which emphasise salvation through belonging to a group that had a special covenant with God, like Judaism, and, secondly, religions of identity, where one had to look within to discover and develop one's relationship with God. If we now add to these two the basic rationalist's standpoint, of individuals who prefer to understand life from a philosophic viewpoint, who at least want to consider the rational feasibility of faith statements before including them in their theories, then philosophy as a tradition also comes into the wider picture. Campbell points out that modern man has a particularly difficult problem to reconcile existence with religion. During the week he lives in the rationalistic, scientific and economic reality of the Western tradition, while Sunday he spends some time with Job, with the result that on Monday he finds himself on the psychiatrist's couch.

In our inquiry into the history of religion, we must keep in mind that we want primarily to look for hints, clues and facts that will help us to understand the believer's view of humanity, the world and God that underpins his theories of salvation. In agreement with Schleiermacher (van Niekerk 1988:119), we want to look at human awareness of God through people's co-existence with others. Another important point that Van Niekerk makes is, that awareness of God presupposes a fully formed, mature personality and does not belong to some childlike phase of human development. We attain this awareness of God on the strength of our presence in the world with other people; the discovery as such is reserved for the personal self.

Carpenter (1920:15) says that all Churches presenting themselves as unique representatives of the Divine by owning the only divine revelations, little concern themselves with other possibilities. Moreover, they manage to persuade the general public of their divine uniqueness to such a degree that few people, even nowadays, realise that virtually all of them had common pagan roots and that they share, by far, the most parts of their doctrines and rites with the latter. "At the base of the process by which divinities and demons were created, and rites for their propitiation and placation established, lay fear and uncertainty. The human survival instinct and the awesome powers of nature, not comprehensible in a prescientific society, brought in a supernatural element, stimulated by fear and imagination of fantastic results. Such superstitious terror produces a state of mind that needs drastic help. The natural defence against this state of mind was the creation of an enormous number of taboos – such as we find among all races and on every conceivable subject - to regulate the thoughts and lives of the community. After they have been weeded, to some degree rationalized, and simplified they were reduced to customs and laws. Furthermore man developed gradually from crass superstition, senseless and accidental, to rudimentary observation, and so to belief in magic, thence to Animism and personification of nature-powers in a more or less human form, as earth-divinities or sky-gods or embodiments of the tribe; and then to placation of these powers by rites such as sacrifice and the Eucharist, which in turn became the foundation of morality."

"The process of cultural evolution rules the process, and ceremonies have been in its main outlines, being the same all over the world – and this is so whether in connection with numerous creeds of paganism or the supposedly unique case of Christianity. It is seen that religious evolution through the ages has been practically one thing. There has been, in fact, a world religion, though with various phases and branches. And so the present day problem arises, namely how to account for the appearance of this great Phenomenon with its orderly phases of evolution and its own spontaneous growth in all corners of the globe – this phenomenon which has such strange sway over the hearts of men, which has attracted them with so weird a charm, which has drawn their devotion, love, and tenderness, which has consoled them in sorrow and

affliction, and yet has stained their history with such horrible sacrifices and persecutions and cruelties? What has been the instigating cause of it?" Carpenter (1920:17) proposes a psychological answer. "It is that the phenomenon proceeds from, and is a necessary accompaniment to the growth in human consciousness itself – its growth, namely through the three stages of enfoldment. These three stages are simple or animal consciousness, self consciousness, and a third stage, which is not as yet effectively named."

However, this theory is only part of the answer. We have to include the total personal growth process, correlated between different cultures in a multidisciplinary way, to get nearer to a spiritual developmental profile that is not too culture specific. Of utmost importance, here is the philosopher's insistence that the quantity and quality of knowledge within a society and over which an individual has proper command, is of crucial importance to his development and the level of maturity attainable.

Myth and philosophy inform religion and Campbell (1974:2) is convinced that the general misconceptions about the true nature and function of myth are at the heart of our present dilemma of impotent religions and therefore our feeling of meaninglessness. "Religion robbed humanity of his inner identity with divinity, while science in turn robbed the Church of its claim to infallibility". The result is that modern man has a new dilemma, to try to find a new base for a value system that will serve his present reality and to bring meaning back into his life. "All cultures have produced such elemental themes as the great mother, miraculous child, and resurrected hero. This is true of all the great world religions – Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam – as well as folklore, allegories and local, tribal religions. These elemental themes must have arisen from a common source. This common source is the human soul and its revelations to consciousness via dreams." In Campbell's (1974: Cover) view, the imagery of dreams is the central spring from which the mythic, and therefore religious, streams of humanity flow. .

3.1 The Functions and Purpose of Myth

The first function of myth, according to Campbell (1996: audio), is to reconcile consciousness to reality, as we perceive it, and to life itself. Considering that life's basic character is monstrous – life eating life - and when consciousness becomes aware of this, a sense of terrific horror, awe and fascination results from this recognition. There are three basic responses to this dilemma: one is affirmation and a desperate effort to understand and explain it as well as possible. The other one is rejection, which Campbell calls the “great reversal”, a feeling or belief that things went terribly wrong and life should not have been. (This answer is that of many of the later Gnostic thinkers.) Even Buddha shares it in part: life is a fire that should eventually be extinguished. The third option is that we will affirm it, on condition that it is understood as we explain it in our books and revelations.

The second function of myth is to present a totalizing image of the cosmos, a cosmological scheme that will explain and confirm these realities as we see them. These may differ in time and space but, as we shall see, the essences remain the same.

The third function is to instate, validate and maintain a certain moral order. This element can differ much in time and space.

The fourth and last function of myth is to deepen the psyche. This represents the philosophical and spiritual interpretation of the myth to find and apply its deeper meanings. The literal story functions as a complex and fanciful riddle, called the “outer mystery” by the mystery religions, while the explanation and application becomes the “inner mystery” accessible only to the spiritually advanced part of the population.

A thorough understanding of these functions of myth is absolutely crucial for understanding man and his religions. Human understanding is correlated with growth and can only develop from mythical understanding; firstly by being fascinated by the magic of the myth, and thereby gaining access to, and

acceptance by the unconscious mind by bypassing the critical rational censoring mechanism to assimilate the story or outer mystery and then progressing from there to its advanced lessons or inner mysteries. Another important aspect of myth is the fact that it, over time, exhibits a virtually unified core story, with values and challenges to humankind. Campbell, (1949) in his book "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", makes this point abundantly clear. He calls it a universal or a "monomyth." This phenomenon is ably confirmed, explained and applied by Riley (1997) in his book "One Jesus, Many Christs". Furthermore a proper understanding of the purpose and functions of initiation rites which are needed to accompany humanity through its most important phase-transfers, is an integral part of the absolutely essential knowledge needed to understand the human psyche as well as any religion or group forming activities.

"Considering the numerous strange rituals that have been reported from the primitive tribes and great civilizations of the past, it becomes apparent that the purpose - and actual effect - of these was to conduct people across those difficult thresholds of transformation that demand a change in the patterns of not only conscious, but also of unconscious life. The so-called rites of passage that occupy such a prominent place in the life of a primitive society (ceremonials of birth, naming, puberty, marriage, burial, etc.), are distinguished by formal, and usually very severe, exercises of perseverance, whereby the mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage being left behind. Then follows an interval of more or less extended removal from societal routine, during which are enacted rituals designed to introduce the life adventurer to the forms and proper feelings of his new state so that when, at last, the time has ripened for the return to the normal world, the initiate will be as good as reborn. Most amazing is the fact that a great number of the ritual trials and images correspond to those that appear automatically in dream, the moment the psychoanalyzed patient begins to abandon his infantile fixations and to progress into the future. It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back."

In fact, says Campbell (1974:10), “it may well be that the very high incidence of neuroticism among ourselves follows from the decline among us of such an effective spiritual aid. We remain fixated to the unexercised images of our infancy, and hence disinclined to the necessary passages of our adulthood.”

3.1.1 The Hero

The hero is the man of self-achieved submission; but submission to what? That precisely is the riddle that today we have to ask ourselves: What is this submission that, always and everywhere, is the primary virtue and historic deed of the hero? As Arnold J. Toynbee (Campbell 1949:18) indicates in his six-volume study of the laws governing the rise and disintegration of civilizations, “schism in the soul and schism in the body social will not be resolved by any scheme of return to the good old days (archaism), or by programs guaranteed to render an ideal projected future (futurism), or even by the most realistic, hard-headed work to weld together again the deteriorating elements. Only birth can conquer death – the birth, not of the old thing again, but of something new. Toynbee uses the terms ‘detachment’ and ‘transfiguration’ to describe the crisis by which the higher spiritual dimension is attained that makes possible the resumption of the work of creation.” The first step, says Campbell (1949:18), “is detachment or withdrawal and consists of a radical transfer of emphasis from the external to the internal world, macro- to microcosm, a retreat from the desperations of the wasteland to the peace of the everlasting realm that is within. In a word: the first work of the hero is to retreat from the world scene of secondary effects, to those causal zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside, and there to clarify the difficulties, eradicate them in his own case (i.e., give battle to the ‘nursery’ demons of his local culture) and break through to the undistorted, direct experience and assimilation of what C.G. Jung has called ‘the archetypal images.’ (on his/her way to Individuation and then Union) This is the process known to Hindu and Buddhist philosophy as ‘viveka’, ‘discrimination’.”

On the wide consensus on the collective unconsciousness, Campbell (1949:18) quotes the following people, beginning with Jung, Nietzsche, Adolph Bastian

(on "Elementary Ideas") and Franz Boas. Sir James G. Frazer (1922:386) said, "We need not, with some enquirers in ancient and modern times, suppose that the Western peoples borrowed from the older civilization of the Orient the conception of the Dying and Reviving God, together with the solemn ritual in which that conception was dramatically set forth before the eyes of the worshippers. More probably the resemblance which may be traced in this respect between the religions of the East and West is no more than what we commonly, though incorrectly, call a fortuitous coincidence, the effect of similar cases acting alike on the similar constitution of the human mind in different countries and under different skies."

Jung (1938:89) points out that he had borrowed his term archetype from classic sources: Cicero, Pliny, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Augustine, etc. Bastian notes the correspondence of his own theory of "Elementary Ideas" with the Stoic concept of the *Logoi spermatikoi*. The tradition of the "subjectively known forms" is, in fact, coextensive with the tradition of myth, and is the key to the understanding and use of mythological images. The archetypes to be discovered and assimilated are precisely those that have inspired, throughout the annals of human culture, the basic images of ritual, mythology, and vision. The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. The hero has died as a material man; but as eternal man – perfected, unspecific, universal man – he has been reborn. His second solemn task and deed therefore, as Toynbee (Campbell 1949: 20) declares (and as all the mythologies of mankind indicate), is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed.

"The multitude of men and women choose the less adventurous way of the comparatively unconscious civic and tribal routines. But these seekers, too, can be saved by virtue of the inherited symbolic aids of society, the rites of passage, and the grace-yielding sacraments, given to mankind of old by the

redeemers and handed down through millennia. It is only those who know neither an inner call nor an outer doctrine," says Campbell (1949:23,30), "whose plight truly is desperate; that is to say, most of us today, in this labyrinth without and within the heart. Alas, where is the guide, that fond virgin, Adriane, to supply the simple clue that will give us courage to face the Minotaur, and the means then to find our way to freedom when the monster has been met and slain? Daedalus simply presented her with a skein of linen thread, which the visiting hero might fix to the entrance and unwind as he went into the maze. It is, indeed, very little that we need! But lacking that, the adventure into the labyrinth is without hope. The passage of the mythological hero may be over ground, incidentally; fundamentally, it is inward – into depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost, forgotten powers are revived for his own empowerment and to be made available for the transfiguration of the world. Like happy families, the myths and the worlds redeemed are all alike.

"We must also look at the relationship of the Hero and the God. The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons upon his fellow man. A majestic representation of the difficulties of the hero-task, and of its sublime import when it is profoundly conceived and solemnly undertaken, is presented in the traditional legend of the Great Struggle of the Buddha." (Campbell 1949: 31) This can also be seen in the stories of Moses, Socrates, Jesus and also in some of his parables, especially that of the prodigal son.

"Whether the hero is ridiculous or sublime, Greek or barbarian, gentile or Jew, his journey varies little in essential plan. Popular tales represent the heroic action as physical; the higher religions show the deed to be moral; nevertheless, there will be found astonishingly little variation in the

morphology of the adventure, the character roles involved, the victories gained. If one or another of the basic elements of the archetypal pattern is omitted from a given fairy tale, legend, ritual, or myth, it is bound to be somehow or other implied – and the omission itself can speak volumes for the history and pathology of the example.” (Campbell 1949: 38)

“A very important, broad characteristic of the story is the ‘Cosmogonic Cycle’ which unrolls the great vision of the creation and the destruction of the world, which is vouchsafed as revelation to the successful hero. This, discussed under ‘Emanations’, treats the coming of the forms of the universe out of the void. The ‘Virgin Birth’, is a review of the creative and redemptive roles of the female power (in a non-sensual, fundamental way), first on a cosmic scale as the Mother of the Universe, then again on the human plane as the mother of the Hero. Then follows the “transformations of the Hero”, this traces the course of the legendary history of the human race through its typical stages, the hero appearing on the scene in various forms according to the changing needs of the race. Lastly, ‘Dissolutions’ tells us of the foretold end, first of the hero, then of the manifest world.” The cosmogony cycle, says Campbell (1949:39), “is presented with astonishing consistency in the sacred writings of all the continents, and it gives to the adventure of the hero a new and interesting turn; for now it appears that the perilous journey was a labour not of attainment but of re-attainment, not discovery but rediscovery. The godly powers sought and dangerously won, are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time. He is “the king’s son” who has come to know who he is and therewith has entered into the exercise of his proper power – ‘God’s son,’ who has learned to know how much that title means. From this point of view the hero is symbolical of that divine creative and redemptive image which is hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life.”

4. THE GENEALOGY OF RELIGION

The reality of the Gods is not directly and objectively accessible to humanity. Either by accepting the revelations and doctrines of a formal religious group, or through inner, subjective experiences can we come to knowledge of the divine working in and through us: This is what the myths and stories about the heroes want to teach us. It must be understood as revelations of some hidden order of reality. This statement has three distinct components; firstly, the authority of the story is unquestioned, you just accept the story as it is; secondly, you must battle with the meaning of it and might receive help if needed; thirdly, you eventually have to apply it to your own quest.

The Greek enlightenment, and especially Plato, wanted to get rid of the outdated mythical elements and concentrate on the philosophy that underlies the stories. The goal was to free the mythical philosophy from the perception of the fickleness of the gods. Plato said the myths were not good for children because they are unable to understand them properly. This was in fact also true of most adults, for those who did not understand its logic. Furthermore, they wanted to advance a natural philosophy that was not based on the “doings” of the gods but on general rules deduced from objective observations and the demands of reason. There must be a differentiation between natural philosophy (science), philosophy (logic and reason) and religion. Aristotle said that the mythical animals belong to a different discipline than biology and cannot be understood otherwise.

There is in fact a mythical way of knowing, but also a spiritual way of knowing, an experiential way of knowing and an intellectual way of knowing. By relating and integrating these ways correctly one comes to an integrated way of knowing, which constitutes one's intuition and one's own truth or gnosis.

4.1 Primal and Ancient Religions

In the transition from primitive to modern religions some primitive elements remained and a study of their bygone cultural context can help us to understand them better. Mankind's struggle for survival and his total dependency on social order, as well as the fear and mystery of death, were the main motivators of all people and in all times. Primal religions are so defined because they existed alongside each other but independently they came to many of the same conclusions about the nature of man, the world and the spiritual realm. In these religions human nature, our social interdependence as well as our dependence on nature, shaped their thoughts and life. Humanity is totally dependent on other human beings and nature. Nature is seen as a web of interrelated dependencies, so man, nature and the cosmos are interdependent. Everything has a share in the cosmic spirit and is of equal status and needs to be revered. We must also make allowances for the fact that there is no stark distinction between the material and spiritual dimension of things. The outlook on life is holistic and social because we need everybody and nature to live a calm, relaxed and serene life. Community is the total focal point and nature is our ally. The primitives normally worship only the Great Spirit, but all other forms of spirits are either worthy of reverence, veneration or respect which is part of a considerate, respectful and spiritual outlook on life.

Primal religious views on God, nature and humanity are not difficult to appreciate because they are based on common sense and a keen observation of reality. In fact it seems that the latest trend in spirituality is very much a coming home to our primal roots. Primal spirituality can help us to understand the development of soteriology from a more logical basis.

Although we want to live in harmony with all, we still need to confront reality and the nature of life. We have seen that life is brutal; life eats life to survive and the survival instinct, unconsciously favours own interest in the first instance. Also hard wired into humanity, but on an evidently lower order of priority to the survival instincts, is a moral sensitivity, which intuitively

accepts the principles of equality in creation and that life in general should be revered. This means that even the act of eating for survival results in a feeling of wrongdoing and guilt, coupled to the conscious realisation of the ever present and powerful killer's instinct of the unmediated survival mechanism. To have peace of mind, one needs to reconcile conscience with the eating and using of other life forms as well as our use, or mostly misuse, of society for our own survival. The only "reasonable" and known answer to "righting these wrongs" is to sacrifice, or make other guilt offerings to the offended party. Therefore, religious rites that accommodate and relieve this guilt are devised, which even resulted in offering humans as a guilt offer to the spirits of the "wronged" ones. Our very basic drives of survival and own interest bring us into perpetual conflict with our communal values and norms and guilt feelings are part of the life of sensitive people.

If you live in caves in small groups and you accept interdependence and the rights of the rest of the "nature spirits" you do not really need an elaborate metaphysical system of supernatural beliefs to survive and even enjoy life. It is when mankind started to settle down and practise agriculture and live in larger communities that their problems multiplied and with it, the number and complexity of questions grew in tandem. They were much more exposed to natural disasters of weather and geology, as well as to human, animal and plant diseases. Social illnesses of uncontrolled egotism, group dominance and the power lust of the militants, who favoured the easy life of reaping benefits from the hard work of others, were all part of their lives, making life difficult and utterly complex in such a prescientific society. They had no clear, reasonable or scientific answers for these problems and they started to look for them in the supernatural realm with a resultant explosion of superstition and cultic, religious activities. The independent spirits of nature now became oppressing gods. Every group had their own god and the best warrior god became the overlord of the victims' god - what a dubious moral honour for the victor! Soon it was a state affair and a group of priests was appointed to mediate between the people, state and the gods. In Mesopotamia, says Noss (1980:42), "the earliest civilization with temples and priests, soon count about 2000 deities, but as the cities fought each other, the winner's god assumed the

dominant role and many gods disappeared in time, although everybody was remarkably accommodating and tolerated other gods of other people, because one can never be quite sure what could happen next in the godly realm. The state religions were run like big business corporations and the books were kept well to account for income and expenses.” The priests in Mesopotamia, according to Noss, “were powerful and offered many services to their clients for which they were very well paid.”

“In Greece, Homer’s ideas about religion were a refinement on the crude and tangled superstition of the peasants. The Indo-European invasion brought a mingling of the deities, which eventually saw Zeus as the chief god. The Greek needed the assistance of the gods for achieving many purposes and their gods were anthropomorphic and near to them. They were invoked for all formal occasions and for everyday happenings. The relationship was cooperative and courteous, not fearful and distant. Zeus fathered a large progeny of heroes, kings and founders of cities. Deification of special people was widespread and the ‘god-man’ featured in many legends. Heroes, the noble dead, half man half-divine, had powerful protective powers. By and large Athenians thought of their deities by seasons of the year, only Zeus was honoured the whole year round.” (Noss, 1980:42)

“The Romans were a practical and formal lot. Their gods had rather vague characters. They entertained no mystical histories, legends of heroes and no cosmogony. The supernatural forces or potentialities called ‘numen’ were at the basis of their religious consciousness and the gods possessed it in abundance and could bestow it on people, their houses or their fields. Their rituals were very formal and there was no room for vague sentimentality. It was a matter of fact business because the relationship with the gods was clearly understood and contractually binding on both parties.” It is, according to Noss (1980:50), “a domestic cult which was nationalized with appointed priests and was well organized. They went about their ceremonies and sacrifices meticulously and dryly.”

4.2 The Eastern Religions

To get an idea of the influence of the Eastern traditions on early Christianity we will be looking at Hinduism, but especially at the religion of Krishna and the Bhagavad Gita, Buddhism, as well as Zoroastrianism, for possible influences.

Firstly, we will look at Hinduism in its various forms. It has one important group of beliefs in common with virtually all Buddhist groups, which stem from a shared view of human suffering and incompleteness. Their soteriological answer to this problem is deduced from keen observation, meditation and extrapolated logically. Nature consists of everlasting cycles of birth, growth, death, decay and rebirth. Everything in creation is a part of the divine reality and possesses a spark of the divine fire; therefore the soul (Atman) is subject to “samsara” – i.e., the transmigration through many forms of the incarnation cycle of rebirth and death, active in all of nature. Together with this belief is the belief in “Karma”; i.e., the soul carries with it the burden of its past actions, which conditions the form of its future incarnations. As long as the soul makes the mistakes that endorse life in this world, works for its own profit and clings to this existence as if this is all there is, it is doomed to suffer an endless cycle of births and deaths. The universal solution is in the soul’s effective apprehension of its essential unity and identity with the Supreme, Atman or Essence and its merging with it rather than to identify with the phenomenal world.

“There are a number of different ways to realise salvation or spiritual release. Three main paths (marga) eventually emerged, namely:

1. The way of knowledge (jnana marga)
2. The way of works (karma marga)
3. The way of devotion (bhakti marga)” (Kruger et al. 1996:75)

These paths are normally combined, but in very different ratios. It is of the utmost importance to our understanding of human spirituality and diversity to

recognize that human beings, in their individual manifestations from immense variation, will differ in their preferences and personal affinity in their spiritual quest.

At an institutional level these differences narrow down to mainly two main streams. One of the ways by which this goal may be attained requires knowledge of the divinity within, through profound self-knowledge and self-effort to overcome egoistic and materialistic tendencies as well as the mastering of meditation techniques and preferably living an ascetic life. But this is by no means a popular way and only a very few manage this strict discipline to realise their goal. Alternatively, the devotional (Bhakti) cults, associated with the gods Vishnu and Shiva as well as with their incarnations, can through an intense personal devotion and duty to the god of their choice earn themselves divine aid to salvation. Buddhism is a special case of the first school while the religion of the saviour Krishna is the most popular of the second school.

The Rig Veda, the ancient religious writings of India, says: "Truth is one; the wise call it by different names." So the two major streams of the Vedic faith was on the one hand private, in respect to an own personal path to divinity through the practice of spiritual discipline, suitable for the spiritually matured and disciplined person. The other stream was followed by the vast majority of people, and is a social, devotional religion, with Brahmans or priests in charge of a complex set of rituals, and presiding over the ancient scriptures of the Vedic tradition. The religion of Krishna falls basically in the latter tradition, but with implied teachings to strive to the personal tradition. We shall see later on that the Christian tradition was also not a singular, consistent tradition in its beginning and we therefore must be sensitive to the obvious similarities and the natural way in which these differences develop.

4.2.1 Hinduism and Lord Krishna

According to Ovey Mohammed (Sugirtharajah 1993:9), to whom I am indebted for his keen insights, Krishna was allegedly born in the six century

B.C.E. and was first known as a student of philosophy. In the fifth century, he was better known as a tribal hero and later on, he was an avatar, or incarnated Saviour who taught his disciple Arjuna and humankind. The stories of his nativity are very much like those of Jesus. A star heralded the miraculous birth and a cruel king, Kamsa, wanted to do him harm. His family fled to Braj and he was also visited by wise men. His identity was also hidden at first. The Bhagavad Gita is the culture specific gospel of Krishna and it states that he was the “unborn” and “eternal”, incarnated God – true god and true human. Krishna also manifested “transfigurations”, to demonstrate the images of the Invincible God.

He taught: “the Highest Person is to be won by love-and-worship, directed at one another”; that he is the way, the truth, and the life, as well as that you must love God and neighbour, but Krishna accepts that there can be other incarnations in time but that he remains the Mediator of salvation. He offers salvation in terms of grace, but the efficacy of the grace depends on our love, faith and faithfulness. True faith translates into trust and commitment. Whatever we do, we should do it for love of God and humanity.

The Gita states that repentance born of love and faith effaces all sin, and no one who comes to God with a humble heart fails to win salvation. Krishna also cuts through the caste and sex divide and opens salvation to all. Arjuna could not relate the teaching of salvation by grace and faith to the various duties, ritualistic and ethical, as described by the Vedic law and Hindu tradition and seen as necessary for salvation. Therefore, Krishna explains to him, “For knowledge of the Veda, for sacrifice, for grim austerities, for gifts of alms, a meed (a measure) of merit is laid down (but) all this the athlete of the spirit leaves behind.” Arjuna was also told that the revelation of God that he received, was due to grace not works, says Ovey Mohammed (Sugirtharajah 1993:16). Reliance on grace, in faith and love, leads to knowledge of God. Gita 18:55; “by love and loyalty he comes to know me as I really am, how great I am and whom, and once he knows me as I am, he enters me forthwith.” Also, “of these (people) the man of wisdom, ever integrated, who loves and worships One alone excels: for to the man of

wisdom I am exceeding dear and he is dear to me.” (Gita 7:17) It is obvious that grace, faith, faithfulness and knowledge go together. In the Gita, wisdom is the opposite of ignorance. Ignorance is not theoretical error but spiritual blindness. “Destroyed is the confusion” and through grace I have re-gained a proper way of thinking: with doubts dispelled I stand ready to do your bidding.” (Gita 18:73) “A man of faith, intent on wisdom, his senses restrained, wins wisdom; and wisdom won he will come right to perfect peace” (Gita 4:39) We must cleanse the soul from attachment to the self and the world. Krishna makes detachment to the pleasures of the world the key to spiritual growth. “I love the man who is the same to friend and foe, the same whether he is respected or despised, the same in heat and cold, in pleasure and pain, who has put away attachment and remains unmoved by praise and blame.” (Gita 12: 18 – 19) Spiritual growth therefore will manifest in the wise and loving person with personal integrity.

True knowledge is experiential because of the revelation from the Spirit within, but knowledge and action are also coupled. In his revelation to Arjuna, Krishna took him beyond the visible world, he broadens his horizon, but he has to come back and work the revelation into his life by working for the good of others. True knowledge will express itself in action. God’s activity through Krishna is the norm and model of all worldly actions. “To work alone you are entitled, never to its fruits. Neither let the motive be the fruit of action, nor let attachment be to non-action.” (Gita 2:47) Furthermore, it states, “It is better to do one’s own duty, though devoid of merit, than to do another’s, however well performed. By doing the work prescribed by one’s own nature, a man meets with no defilement.” (Gita 18: 47) The goal of action according to the Gita is twofold; it is the salvation of the individual and the welfare of the community. (Gita 3: 25) “When action is performed with a view towards the welfare of humanity, based on the love of God and neighbour, action and the true knowledge of God are fused, then the double concern, that of salvation of the individual and the love of neighbour, is achieved”, says Mohammed. (Sugirtharajah 1993:21) “Love of God has to be expressed in concern for ones neighbour. Work for the sanctification of others alone, is not only the highest expression of the love of neighbour, but also for

the love of God; it is the surrender of one's self, entirely to God's plans and wishes, in order to cooperate in the divine redemptive mission of the world. Salvation in the Gita is eternal communication with the living God. It is not those who say, 'Lord, Lord' who will enter the kingdom but those who do his will." According to Krishna, man has to work out his salvation and thereby he claims his grace. Man needs to overcome his "self" to realise and nurture the god within that lets him love and serve others, whereby he claims his grace; it is not totally without obligation; he must live life as a loving instrument of God."

Comparing the message of Krishna to that of Jesus, from the so-called first layers of the synoptic gospels, as well as recognising his spiritual affinities, it is difficult to find any seriously contradictory aspects. In addition, when the role of Krishna is compared to that ascribed to Jesus in the process of developing a special brand of "unified" Jewish-Pagan-Christ-Mystery, only the literal, outer or cultural elements differ in a material way, the morality and soteriology are remarkably similar.

4.2.2 The Buddha and Buddhism

Prince Siddhartha was born in the middle of the sixth century B.C.E., according to Eknath Easwaran (1987:15). "This was a time of creative spiritual upheaval in most of the major civilizations of antiquity. With only a hundred years on either side, we have Krishna, Confucius in China, Zoroaster in Persia, the pre-Socratic philosophers of ancient Greece and the later, important prophets in Israel. Into this world, poised between the Vedic past and a new high water mark of Indian culture, the Buddha was born. Like Jesus, it may be said that he came, not to destroy tradition, but to fulfil its meaning. Moreover, as Jesus rose out of the tradition of the prophets and yet transcends all traditions and breaks all moulds, the Buddha, though he broke with rituals and the authority of the Vedas, stands squarely in the tradition of the Upanishads. Vitality, a sublime self-confidence and emphasis on direct experience and meditation, without reference to any outside authority, a passionate trust in truth and in the oneness of life, as well as in our human

capacity to take our destiny into our own hands – all these are the very spirit of the Upanishads and no one embodies it better than the Buddha. He sought to save, and the joy in his message is the joy of knowing that he has found a way for everyone, not just the sages, to put an end to sorrow. He argues with no one, denies no faith, convinces only with truth and love.” (Easwaran 1987:18) Buddha represents, in an exemplary way, the universal predominantly intellectual, rational or philosophical seeker of the spiritual truths.

In his life and teaching, we also see some “universals” or natural, religious processes playing themselves out. The “Tempter” called Mara, the representative of Death and every selfish passion that ties us to the mortal body, also tries to throw him off course with “fierce armies” of lust, cowardice, doubt, hypocrisy, the desire for honour and fame, etc.; trying to thwart the escape from, and to lure us to, “his” domain. To “awake”, the literal meaning of the word “Buddha” is to “see clearly” what life is, and how to escape from its bondage. To go “upstream” away from Mara and his realm, to be able to say, ‘I have found the deathless, the unconditioned’, I have seen life as it is. I have entered nirvana, beyond the reach of sorrow.” The way that Buddha teaches is by “right understanding” and by “right practice”. This is done by grasping the “Four noble truths” and incorporating the “Eightfold path” into your life.

We will be following Easwaran’s (1987:30) interpretation of the Buddha’s message: “The first Truth – brothers, is the fact of suffering. All desires, happiness, ‘sukha’, what is good pleasant, right, permanent, joyful, harmonious, satisfying, being at ease. Yet we all find that life brings ‘dukkha’, just the opposite; frustration, dissatisfaction, incompleteness, suffering, sorrow. Life changes and change can never satisfy desire. Therefore, everything that changes brings suffering. Change and impermanence are like a wheel that is out of kilter.

“The second Truth is the cause of suffering. It is not life that brings sorrow, but the demands we make on life. The cause of ‘dukkha’ is selfish desire: ‘trishna’, the thirst to have what one wants and to get one’s own way.

Thinking life can make them happy by bringing what they want, people run after satisfaction of their desires. But they get only unhappiness, because selfishness can only bring sorrow. There is no fire like selfish desire, brothers. Not a hundred years of experience can extinguish it, for the more you feed it, the more it burns. It demands what real life experience cannot give: permanent pleasure unmixed with anything unpleasant. But there is no end to such desires; that is the nature of the mind. Suffering, because life cannot satisfy selfish desire, is like suffering because a banana tree will not bear mangoes.

“There is a Third Truth, brothers. Any ailment that can be understood can be cured, and suffering that has a cause has also an end. When the fires of selfishness have been extinguished, when the mind is free of selfish desire, what remains is a state of wakefulness, of peace, of joy, of perfect health, called ‘that which is extinguished’: ‘nirvana.’

“The fourth Truth is that selfishness can be extinguished by the following: an eightfold path: right understanding; right purpose; right speech; right conduct; right occupation; right effort; right attention and right meditation. ‘If dharma is a wheel, these eight are its spokes’.

“Right understanding is seeing life as it is. In the midst of change, where is there a place to stand firm? Where is there anything to have and hold? To know that happiness cannot come from anything outside; that all things that come into being have to pass away. This is right understanding, the beginning of wisdom. Right purpose follows from right understanding. It means willing, desiring and thinking, which are in line with life as it is. As a flood sweeps away a slumbering village, death sweeps away a lumbering pilgrim; death sweeps away those who are under-prepared. Remembering this, order your life around learning to live for the right purposes, from right understanding. That is right purpose. Right speech, right action and right occupation, all follow from right purpose. They mean living in harmony with the unity of life: speaking kindly, acting kindly, living not just for oneself but for the welfare of all – all creatures love life; all creatures fear pain. Therefore, treat all

creatures as yourself, for the dharma of a human being is not to harm but to help.

“The last three steps, brothers, deal with the mind. Everything depends on the mind. Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think. Suffering follows an evil thought as the wheels of cart follow the oxen that draw it. Joy follows a pure thought like a shadow that never leaves. Right effort is the constant endeavour to train oneself in thought, word, and action. As a gymnast trains his body, those who desire nirvana must train the mind. Only through ceaseless effort can you reach the goal. Right attention follows from right effort (also from right understanding and right purpose). It means keeping the mind where it should be. The wise train the mind to give complete attention to one thing at a time, here and now. Those who follow me must be always mindful, their thoughts focused on the dharma; day and night they contemplate what is positive, what benefits others, what is conducive to kindness or peace of mind; these states of mind lead to progress; give them full attention. Whatever is negative, whatever is self centred, what feeds malicious thoughts or stirs up the mind, those states of mind draw one downward; turn your attention away. Hard it is to train the mind, which goes where it likes and does what it wants. An unruly mind suffers and causes suffering whatever it does. But a well-trained mind brings health and happiness.” “Right meditation is the means of training the mind. As rain seeps through an ill-thatched hut, selfish passion will seep through an untrained mind. Train your mind through meditation. Selfish passions will not enter and your mind will grow calm and kind.

“This, brothers, is the path that I myself have followed. No other path so purifies the mind. Follow this path and conquer Mara; its end is the end of sorrow. But all the effort must be made by you. Buddha’s only show the way.” (Easwaran 1987:30-33) There is no need to take to the monastic life, he told them, in order to follow dharma. All the disciplines of the Eightfold Path, including meditation, can be followed by householders if they do their best to give up selfish attachment. The middle path is a course lying between too much and too little; is the way of the Eightfold Path.

“On metaphysics – Malunkyaputra asked, ‘Blessed One, there are theories which you have left unexplained and set aside unanswered. Whether the world is eternal or not eternal; whether it is finite or infinite; whether the soul and the body are the same or different, whether a person who has attained nirvana exists after death or does not, etc., etc. – The Buddha replied: ‘When you took to the spiritual life, did I ever promise you I would answer these questions? – I do not teach these questions – I teach how to remove the arrow: the truth of suffering, its origin and its end, is the noble Eightfold Path – whatever is fascinating to discuss, divides people against each other, but has no bearing on putting an end to sorrow. What I know is like the leaves on the tree; what I teach is only a small part – only what is necessary to take you to the other shore.’ “Be a refuge unto yourselves. Be a lamp unto yourselves. Rely only on yourselves and on nothing else.” “All things that come into being must pass away. Strive earnestly!” (Easwaran 1987:41)

“Through meditation you can reach the unity state which will leave an indelible imprint. Never again will you believe yourself to be a separate creature, a finite physical entity that was born to die. You know first hand that you are inseparable from the whole of creation, and you are charged by the power of this experience to serve all life.” (Easwaran 1987:56)

“The experience of Unity has to be repeated over and over until it becomes the reality. Your goal is to reach such a depth that even in dreams the awareness of unity remains unbroken: you are then awake, on the very floor of the unconscious, and life is a seamless whole. This is nirvana; the seeds of a separate personality to be cherished are burned out. When you return to the surface of consciousness, you pick up the appearance of personality and slip it on again. But it is the personality of a new person, purified of separateness and reborn in the love of all life. The work of life has been completed and you now can give your attention to your service to creation.

“Little by little we make ourselves good, as a bucket fills with water drop by drop. Little by little as we change we also change the world we live in,” says

Buddha. Karma is stored in the mind. "Our life is shaped by our mind, for we become what we think. As irrigators lead water to their fields, as archers make their arrows straight, as carpenters carve wood, the wise shape their lives; they become masters of themselves, knowing that the mind itself – quick, fickle, and exceedingly difficult to focus, is the realm of Mara. The evolution from immaturity to wisdom is a long road, longest of all for those who do not base their actions on some deeper purpose in life." (Easwaran 1987:91) It is a balanced, total and comprehensive strategy.

"On Atman or Self – Several times the Buddha says that human beings are 'an atman, without a self', thus apparently contradicting a principle that is the very basis of the faith: that the core of every creature is a divine Self (Atman). But the Buddha never indulges in metaphysics. His concern was relentlessly practical; life is full of suffering, the cause of that suffering is selfishness, and practising the Eightfold Path can overcome selfishness by getting rid of the selfish, 'unique' ego and its selfish wants and desires; anything else is a distraction. On what lay beyond the impermanent world of the ego and change, his attitude was simply, 'first go there; then see for yourself.' If you have gone that far on the practical road of self-denial and ego extinction, then only will you be in a position to evaluate the merit of the 'unitary Self' and not just adopt the grandiose Self as a new identity which will be only another form of a more deluded variety. When you have successfully conquered yourself you will know the truth, which will not be a 'separate', self or Self. By offering no metaphysical support, he prompts us to plunge deep into contemplation and meditation and to see clearly for ourselves what we discover. He therefore emphasizes self-reliance to see for ourselves what the truths are and not to speculate with grandiose ideas. The authentic self will live for others and love its enemies. This cannot be a theoretical construct of a normal unenlightened person, a Buddha will neither cherish 'for' or 'against' and who knows the hidden meaning or purpose of life." (Easwaran 1987; 118)

Nagarjuna, the brilliant second century Buddhist dialectician, claimed that the Buddha used the "self" only as a teaching device and that he actually took no stand whatsoever on it. You need to see for yourself once you have mastered

your own life. The point is that the self, that represents bodily survival, is normally not satisfied with the state of “being” but forever wanting more; the will to pleasure and things as well as the will to power, are not what you want to develop. The spiritual Self, the one that represents the will to meaning by subduing and managing the material self through self mastery, wisdom and loving service of others, is the eternal Self. Realising and believing this is but the beginning, as the “faith” stage is only the necessary first step of any spiritual journey. For Buddha, faith supplements and follows experience and knowledge in a classic “first hand” faith. Understanding, self-mastery, contemplation and meditation are the only ways to experience this eternal truth and to integrate its fruits into your life. The grace of God is already present in you; it is up to you to make it functional and effective in your daily life. We need to claim our grace by making it operative and assume our role as sons and daughters of His kingdom.

Buddha knew this is not an easy way to salvation. Therefore, after he reached nirvana, he was tempted to leave this world because he thought that he would have very few students. He somehow came to the realisation that with the universal Spirit within everybody, the task will be difficult but not impossible. His love of humanity drove him to teach the way out of compassion for others, but in such a way that it is intelligible and accessible to all people, leaving only the “will to meaning” or motivational part to the individual. About the concept of God, he knew that man could not know or understand God and that speculative theories about God, in a general objective way, are nonsense. But the Buddha never insulted the gods or interfered with their committed followers. If the cultic gods are of help to the less ardent seekers, let it be so, but he knew that you could do without metaphysical speculation, by looking inward for your direction and by understanding the four noble truths and by practising the eightfold path.

The worldview of Buddha is also directly influenced by his view of man and God. Man is in a “bonded” state, but only because of his ignorance, resulting in undisciplined, unspiritual, selfish behaviour. To make progress, we must become motivated to practise going against our selfish nature; the Buddha

calls this swimming against the current; to develop morally virtuous habits, as Confucius and Aristotle would phrase it. There is no need for a “primordial mistake” or any “sin of the fathers” type of explanation; you must, and can, rectify the situation with the help of the Spirit within, through understanding the nature of your dilemma and by following rational guiding principles. That is, of course, if you value and desire wisdom and spiritual maturity or salvation.

4.2.3 Zoroastrianism and Related Religions

Zoroaster was born, according to various estimates, between the fifteenth and the sixth century B.C.E. in Persia and was a prophet of the one God, Ahura-Mazda of the Persians. Like Krishna, Buddha and Jesus, he was a pivotal person in a religious tradition and eventually became a “divine” person. Zoroaster preached a new revelation, which was written down in the Avesta (later called Zand-Avesta), the book of knowledge and wisdom. Zoroaster found the old religions of Persia to be in a sorry state. A strong class of Magi, or priests, claimed that by prayers and sacrifice they could influence the gods. Zoroaster proclaimed the one God, Ahura Mazda, or Ormazd, who was the Lord of Light. He said that Ahura Mazda had given him the Avesta and had commanded him to preach its message. Zoroaster explains the source of evil to be the work of Ahriman, the Prince of Darkness. Ahriman is forever at war with Ahura Mazda, and it is constantly tempting men into sin. Scholars make the observation that the Devil also came into existence for Judaism during or just after the exile, together with many other concepts that we will discuss presently.

Zoroaster summarized man’s duties as good thoughts, good works and deeds. Zoroastrianism also put more stress on morality than did other religions of the time. The evil one was responsible for spiritual pollution and therefore also the phenomenon of death. The battle between good and evil will continue till the end time, when God will send His Saviour (Saoshyant) who will defeat evil once and for all, making creation fresh and new once again. At that time

unhappiness, poverty, illness, disease and death will be no more, and men will neither hunger nor thirst.

By taking a closer look at the birth and life of Zoroaster we can also see some very common elements shared with Krishna and Jesus. The parents of Zoroaster had a dream that they would receive a very special child that would change the world. Evil people, magicians, who knew of this special boy's birth wanted to kill his virgin mother. Before his birth a very bright light shone around his house. At his birth he laughed instead of cried, which was another indication of divine birth. Soon after his birth an evil man named Durasarun planned to kill Zoroaster because he had heard that Zoroaster was sent by Ahura Mazda to get rid of evil. He was put into a burning fire but was rescued by an angel (like Daniel). Several other unsuccessful attempts followed but he grew up to be a happy boy. Zoroaster spent many years studying the faith of Ahura-Mazda and at twenty he felt that he needed to get closer to God. He left home and spent ten years in prayer and meditation on the mountains. Satan offered him the entire world if he would forsake his worship of Ahura-Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom. When he refused, Satan threatened to destroy him. At thirty, something very special happened to him as he was wading through the river Daitya. He had a vision of God, in the form of a glowing light, which was actually Bahman-Ameshaspand, who led him to the court of Ahura-Mazda. There he learnt about the functions of the other heavenly beings and the Lord Supreme revealed many other things to him.

As in Hinduism, the Zoroastrian initiation into the Religion symbolises spiritual rebirth or second birth. Firstly, the child recites the confession of Faith, after which the new sacred shirt is worn (rebirth); then follows the repentance ceremony, the recitation of the Articles of faith and finally the benediction. What is noteworthy of "The confession" is the fact that it describes the religion of Zoroaster as the best and most perfect, but not the only religion. The initiate repents all his sins, "I repent of all the evil thoughts that I may have entertained in my mind, all the evil words I may have spoken, of all the evil deeds that I may have done", as witness to this religion's solid

moral base. After the final benediction, which is a prayer to praise the Good Angels and Immortal Spirits in the service of Almighty God, as well as good wishes to the initiate, follows the communal meal when the guests feast on traditional Parsi food, according to Zenobia Patal (Modi 2001: internet) .

The doctrine of the Afterlife is also very interesting. A person's soul meets, after death, an exact counterpart of his actions in this world. If he/she lived a good life, he/she gets blessedness in the next life and if he/she has led a dishonest life he gets anguish, pain, sorrow and suffering. An interesting point here is that after death the soul, either truthful or untruthful, goes through three nights of judging. The truthful soul during the first three nights rejoices in happiness, peace, and laudation due to his/her past good thoughts, words, and deeds, while the wicked soul of the untruthful are in agony, discomfort, and chastisement. They both pass on to the Account Keepers Bridge (Chinvat), on the morning of the third day for final judgment.

"On the doctrines of the last things, Zoroaster proclaims that Ahura-Mazda will send the Divine Saviour (the Saoshyant) who will teach men righteousness and fight evil. Finally, one day, the world will be 'made fresh' by God – the divine event of 'Frashogad' will take place, when all men and women will be judged and made undying and immortal, evil defeated, and the dead made alive once again. (Even the wicked dead now get a fresh new start). These concepts of heaven and hell, of the saviours to come, the Virgin birth (the Saviour will be born of a virgin), the final Judgment, the Bathing of the world by Fire, the final battle between good and evil, the final defeat of evil and the resurrection of the dead – these are all Aryan Zoroastrian concepts which filtered down into Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Truly, our religion was the mother religion of the world!" (Questions from a Zarathushtri Youth – Zoroastrianism website)

The Zoroastrian worldview and view of humanity is a positive one. Basically, creation is good but the work of the devil needs to be known and opposed, but man is equipped to do it if he so chooses. Man will be held responsible for his own salvation and good thoughts, good words and good deeds will be

advantageous for you spiritually, in this world and the next. You could get some help from the heavenly realm but only at the very end of time, when the Saviour will redeem all mankind and conquer the evil forces, also the wicked dead who by now will also have learned their lessons and the cosmos will be made new. God gave us his divine Prophets, as knowledge workers, revealers, but we must carry our own cross. A final interesting aspect of this religion is their total disregard of conversions. Religion must grow from within because religion is to a very high degree a cultural affair. There is only one God and all people and religions seek to reunite with Him, but Zoroastrianism is the very best way to attain salvation - according to its followers, of course.

4.3 The Philosophers and the Gods

The foundation of Christian theology is that the world was created by God; the two main sources informing it are, the Middle Eastern traditions and Hellenic culture, especially Greek philosophy. There is, however, a difference in approach and it is summed up well by Tertullian's rhetorical question, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" According to Allen (1985: iv, 4) everybody needs to know some philosophy to understand the major doctrines of Christianity or to read a great theologian intelligently.

The Genesis stories of creation make it clear that the world had a beginning and is therefore not eternal. This means the world is not ultimate. God, its maker, is without beginning, and therefore only He is ultimate. This is utterly different from Aristotle's view. For him the universe had no beginning. It has always existed and always will exist; it is in a perpetual cycle of movement and change. Aristotle's First Cause or Prime Mover, which he also called the Unmoved Mover, is the most excellent and exalted being in the universe, but it is indeed just that, a being that is part of the universe. Its existence is inferred from the motions we observe on earth and in the heavens. We see here two fundamental respects in which Aristotle differs from the apparently simple story of Genesis; ontologically and epistemologically. The bases of the claims Genesis and Aristotle make are radically different. Aristotle is a scientist, concerned with, and wanting to account for, the order of the world we

perceive. Nothing is asserted or postulated which is not needed to account for this order; although one of the greatest minds in history, he is not concerned with the question of why do we have a world at all, rather than nothing. He works from the fact that it is a reality, and tries to explain the order that he perceives in the cosmos. For him its existence is not problematic. What concerns him is to discover the principles on which the world operates so that we could have a better life. This search for the principles that motivate Aristotle, and therefore the reasons and claims he makes, is validated only by their success in explaining its operations accurately. Priestly oracles and poetry, divine revelations and supernaturally inspired books are dismissed and ignored as a basis for making claims and giving explanations about the world's operations.

Absolute knowledge claims by science has exactly the same problem than revelatory religions. There is no such thing as perfect and final knowledge in this world. Man with his finite potentialities will never be capable of fully understanding the complexities of the infinite and ever changing whole of reality, in all its absolute micro elements and macro relationships and within the total scheme of things. Religions which claim to explain, define and lay claim to exclusive, factual knowledge and revelations from the Unknowable, which we call God, share in the same deceitful arrogance as the "super scientist". Both groups expect others to accept these claims with blind and unwavering "faith" in their religion or pseudo science. It should be obvious that the better answers, for the good of humanity and our spiritual development, lie in wisdom, somewhere between these two extreme options. In the scientific effort of Aristotle, he is forced to invoke the "unmoved mover" to "explain" the initial movement; therefore he also involved an element of speculative philosophy or a statement of faith. Science will forever have "philosophical" or "theoretical" elements because of incomplete knowledge, and the impossibility of proving scientifically everything that happened in the past and therefore, to foresee the future in an absolute way. Furthermore, science is ill equipped to investigate a non-material or spiritual reality. Religious beliefs will ever be subjective and on the level of "personal truths" and not objective or verifiable truths.

“Christian Theology is inherently Hellenistic because it could not exist as a discipline without taking over a measure of intellectual curiosity and rationality from ancient Greece. The ancient Egyptians said that the Greeks were like children because they were always asking ‘why?’ – It is not that other ancient peoples, including the Israelites, did not ask the why’s and the wherefores of many things, it is rather that in Ancient Greek the practice of asking and analysing, became a matter of principle. It is as a result of this particular attitude, which led to the very notion of a ‘discipline’, that the ancient Greeks became the founders of many of our traditional disciplines, including theology. In the Old Testament we find many instances of persistent questioning and inquiry, such as, why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? Why does God not protect them from other nations and why does He not deliver them from oppression? This does not necessarily lead to a theoretical discipline, especially if the answers are based on religious speculation and only on mythic understanding.” (Allen 1985:5)

The spiritual seekers in Jesus’ days also asked many and serious questions, and came to a myriad different answers. Later on a strong hierarchical institution discouraged differences and variety for the sake of uniformity in theology and for unity of command. Due to the many voices and opinions expressed in the Bible, you will need an imaginative speculative philosophy to create a unified theology – which in my opinion is not really possible without bending the rules of logic and consistency. Therefore, said Allen (1985:5), “when people call for a purging of Greek philosophy from Christian theology, unless they are referring to specific ideas or concepts, they are really calling for the end of the discipline of theology itself, though they may not realize it.”

Another fact must temper our theological inquiry: “It must be recognized that however much we want complete comprehension, the ontological status of deity is such that God exceeds our comprehension.” (Allen, 1985: 6) Here we can see the effect of the ontological status of God on epistemology, that is, the effect of the ‘kind’ of being we are dealing with in theology, on what we can

hope to understand and on the nature of the ground, or basis of, the claims we make.

How then, can we base or anchor our knowledge of God for the purpose of analysing and understanding the deity and his relation to us? Virtually all religions base their claims on “special revelations” of certain “holy” persons and/or scriptures. How can we validate these claims to ascertain whom we must believe? Or is there another way of knowing, that is more objective? Is there anything about the created universe, its order and its very existence, which gives us a basis to claim that it had a creator? These questions are the inspiration of a series of “proofs” over time, to prove that God exists, but philosophically they are all found wanting on the basis of science and logic. They are usually only “effective for believers” in a specific revelation, that also lays down and proposes the propositions for the arguments, and are therefore essentially circular. The problem for theology is that God’s ontological uniqueness limits our understanding of God either to special revelation or to personal experience, both totally immune to objective analysis and proofs.

4.3.1 The Predominantly Scientific Philosophers

With economy of space in mind, I decided to divide the Philosophers to be discussed into two groups, knowing full well that it is only a practical tool. The intrinsically practical or “scientific” philosophers basically steered away from metaphysics or god-talk, as far as it is possible to do so. Therefore, we will enlist their wisdom primarily for their view of the cosmos and of humanity. We will start with Confucius and Aristotle because of the interesting similarities between the two masters, and then go on to Socrates who is basically in a league of his own - more of an ancient social scientist. Please note that all three of these philosophers, although they did not indulge in religious speculation, were highly developed moral persons. In fact, they could be regarded as outstanding moral theorists. Socrates was not that much interested in physical science, but as a “social scientist” with exceptional insight he is to my mind in virtually the same league as Jesus, as an example

of a fully developed intelligent and moral human specimen and as a desperately needed hero and role model in his society.

4.3.1.1 Confucius

Confucius lived in the state of Lu (c. 551 – 479 B.C.E.) According to Jaspers (1957:43), “Confucius first looked for solutions of the present in the past. Independent thought without enough background facts, is futile: ‘I have gone without food and sleep in order to think; to no avail; it is better to learn.’ But, learning and thinking go hand in hand. One demands the other: ‘To learn without thinking is vain.’ The substance and source of our being is to be sought in history. Without the stories and examples of the heroes it is very difficult to learn the right values and practices. He studied history in a critical fashion and distinguishes between good and bad to select the facts that are worth remembering and to be used as models to be emulated, or examples to be avoided. He is totally aware of the time and cultural gap, ‘A man born in our days who returns to the ways of antiquity is a fool and brings misfortune upon himself.’ He is looking only for the eternal truths that seem to be discovered independently by the wise people of all ages, but are more clearly discernable in antiquity. He points the way to a conservative form of life, made dynamic by a liberal open-mindedness. This is done by learning, which means not merely to acquire information about something but to make it our own. This true ‘learning’ is gained by books, schooling and experience. Without learning all other virtues are obscured as though by a fog and proper practical sensitivity based on the appropriate values cannot be cultivated. Without learning, frankness becomes vulgarity; bravery, disobedience; firmness, eccentricity; humanity, stupidity; wisdom, flightiness; sincerity a plague. This proper education should culminate in the ideal of the ‘superior man.’ The superior man is concerned with justice and the inferior man with profit. Through self-mastery and by carefully selecting your friends, ‘The superior man honours the worthy and tolerates all men.’ But in his dealings with others, the superior man keeps his wits about him: ‘He may let others lie to him but not make a fool of him.’ What makes a place beautiful is the

humanity that dwells there. He who is able to choose and does not settle among humane people is not wise.’ ”

The moral-political ethos of Confucius is superbly summarized by Jaspers (1957:51), and it is virtually impossible to improve on his effort. “It is fashioned in man’s association with one another and in government, manifested in the ideal of the superior man. He does not believe that asceticism is the answer to man’s problems because man is basically a social being and should take responsibility for the world he lives in. ‘If the world were in order, there would be no need of me to change it.’ His basic wisdom relates to the nature of man, to the necessity of a social order, to the question of truth and clarity in language, to the nature of our thinking, to the absolute character of the source and the relativity of the manifestations – and finally to the One who holds all things together and to which all things relate. In every case, Confucius’ main concern is man and human society. The nature of man is called jên. Jên is humanity and morality in one. The ideogram means ‘man’ and ‘two’, that is to say: to be human means to be in communication.

“The question about the nature of man is answered, first in the elucidation of what he is and should be; second in an account of the diversity of his existence. Firstly, a man must become a man. For man is not like the animals, which are as they are, whose instincts govern their existence without conscious thought; he is a task to himself. Men actively shape their life together and, transcending all instinct, build it on their mutual human obligation. Humanity underlies every particular good. ‘The ethical man puts the difficulty first and the reward last.’ He conquers himself first.

“Secondly, the nature of man is manifested in the diversity of human existence. Men resemble one another in essence – in jên. But they differ “in habits,” individual character, age, stage of development, and knowledge. The ages of life: ‘In youth when the vital forces are not yet developed, guard against sensuality; in manhood, when the vital forces have attained their full strength, against quarrelsomeness; in old age, when the forces are on the wane, against avarice.’ Human types; Confucius distinguishes four types or levels of man. The highest type consists of the saints, those who seem to possess knowledge from birth. Confucius never saw a saint, but he has no doubt that they existed in antiquity. The second level comprises those who must acquire knowledge by learning; they can become ‘superior men’. Then, men of the third level find it hard to learn, but they do not let this discourage them. Those of the fourth level find it hard to make any effort. The two middle types are on their way; they progress though they may fail. ‘Only the highest wise men and the lowest fools are unchangeable’” (Jaspers 1957:51)

“The source is absolute, the manifestation relative: Truth and reality are one. The root of human salvation lies in the ‘knowledge that influences reality,’ that is, in the truth of ideas that are translated into an inner, transforming action. What is true within takes form without. ‘Things have roots and ramifications.’ The absoluteness of the origin enters into the relativity of the manifestations. If the root is good, if it is knowledge, reality, then the ideas become true, consciousness becomes right, the man is cultivated and further, the house will be well regulated, the state in order, the world at peace. From the Son of Heaven (saint) to the common man, education is the root. He who cannot teach the members of his household cannot teach other men. But if ‘humanity reigns in the house of the serious man, humanity will flower in the whole state.’

“The necessity of order: Order is necessary because it is only in human association that the essence of man is real. Order is based on a first principle, which throughout life can serve as a guide to action. Here already can we see the Golden Rule in action, ‘Do to no one what you would not wish others to do to you.’ In acting on this rule, men are bound by a sense of equality (shu).

Do not display to your inferiors what you hate in your superiors. Do not offer your neighbours on the left what you hate in your neighbours on the right. But when Lao-tzu taught that one should repay hostility with good deeds, Confucius answered: 'With what then shall we reward good deeds? No, reward hostility with justice, and good deeds with good deeds.' " (Jaspers 1957:52) Laws are a means of government, but only to a limited degree do they bring results. And, intrinsically, they are harmful. Example is better than law. For where the laws govern, the people are shameless in evading punishment. But where example governs, the people have a sense of shame and improve. When an appeal is made to the laws, it means that something is not in order.

Jaspers (1975:53) sums up Confucius' doctrine: "No one can be regarded as a superior man who does not know the calling of heaven; no one can be regarded as mature who does not know the laws of conduct (li); no one can know a man who does not understand his words." Morality is the love of mankind; wisdom is the knowledge of men, apart from this, "the One" is discernible in Confucius' awareness of limits.

When asked about death, nature, and the world order, he gave answers that left the question open – not because he was given to secretiveness but because he knew there are no definitive answers and that questions are mostly based on the wrong motives of escapism and personal gratification. However, Jaspers (1957:55) says that we do feel his acknowledgement of the last thing in his pious observance of customs and maxims, which shows his belief in the existence of spirits and omens, but in a peculiar way. Asked about the cult of spirits, he replied: "If you cannot serve men how shall you serve spirits?" Questioned about wisdom, he answered: "To devote yourself to your duty towards men, to honour the demons and gods, and keep away from them, that may be called wisdom." The words of a Japanese Confucian in the ninth century are, according to Jaspers, quite in the spirit of Confucius: "If only the heart follows the path of truth, you need not pray, the gods will protect you." "Death and life are the will of heaven". It is meaningless to inquire about death: "If you do not know life, how should you know death?"

“Of myself I can only say that I have striven insatiably to become so (a superior man), and that I teach others untiringly.” The superior man is no saint. The saint is born; he is what he is; the superior man becomes what he is through self-discipline. ‘To have the truth is the path of heaven, to seek the truth is the path of men. He who has the truth finds the right action without pains, achieves success without reflection.’ But he who seeks the truth chooses the good and holds it fast. He investigates, he questions critically, and he ponders the truth and resolutely acts on it. The superior man does not waste himself on what is distant, on what is absent. He stands in the here and now, in the real situation. ‘The superior man’s path is like a long journey; you must begin from right here.’ ‘The superior man’s path begins with the concerns of the common man and woman, but it reaches into the distance, penetrating heaven and earth.’ ” (Jaspers, 1957: 49)

How strikingly clear and effective is his philosophy of life. People are social beings, need to be ordered in a civilized way, to reach own maximum potentialities; employed for the goodwill of all and this is best done if there is proper education towards the clear goal of the “superior man”, who is also the cultural and spiritual hero. The sum total of the superior men would constitute the model society or, if you will, with some small modifications the kingdom of God. Respect should be shown to the unknowable, heavenly realm but a good life, which also considers the interest of all and which is governed by wisdom and reason, should free you from the worries about death and the judgment of the gods.

4.3.1.2 Aristotle

Aristotle saw logic as the foundation on which all learning is based. He called his logic “analytika”, which means “unravelling”. Every science or field of knowledge had to start from a set of first principles, or axioms. From these its truths could be deduced by logic (or unravelled). These axioms define the subjects’ field of activity, separating it from irrelevant or incompatible elements. Biology and poetry, for instance, start from mutually exclusive

premises. Therefore mythical beasts are not a part of biology and there is no need to write it in the form of biology. This logical approach released entire fields of knowledge. In true Greek fashion he saw education as the way forward for humanity, believing that an educated man differed from an uneducated one 'as much as the living from the dead'.

To understand the ethics of Aristotle one needs to have knowledge of Greek ethics. In Greece ethics in all periods essentially revolved around two terms, "eudaimonía", and "arête", which are traditionally rendered, "happiness" and "virtue". The Greeks, however, attributed eudaimonia to someone as a state or condition of being, rather than to what would normally be the source of such feelings. It is rather the possession of what is thought to be desirable. Eudaimonia, is more an objective condition of a person; a state of being, of well-being or flourishing. It is coupled to satisfaction with a life that is self-realising and meaningful according to accepted principles and virtues, which are rational and appreciated by others and ourselves. It is the happiness or feeling of contentment that comes from satisfaction with a worthwhile way of life. It goes together with knowledge, self-control, wisdom, self-respect, individuation and meaningful relationships, based on love and respect for others; the result of a satisfying, virtuous life. Happiness, then, is something final (not instrumental) and self-sufficient, and is the end (result) of action. (Aristotle 1988:12)

The relationship between virtue and arête is a complex one. Things, as well as people, can be described as possessing their appropriate arête. (Excellence) The basic Greek list of virtues includes wisdom, justice, courage and moderation, with piety, which relates to right behaviour towards the gods, which is often added as a fifth. To attain the satisfactory state of eudiamonia one needs to reflect about what is really desirable in human life: how should a man live in order that we may reasonably say of him that he has lived successfully? Socrates' own answer, which is echoed by nearly everyone else in the Greek tradition, gives pride of place to arête. If arête were equivalent to virtue, this could be taken as a simple assertion that the good life is, necessarily, a good moral life. As it happens, this might fairly represent the

core of Socrates' position – and of Plato's, to the extent that we can distinguish the two. But Aristotle seems finally to adopt a quite different view, for him, the life “in accordance with *arête*” in the highest sense, turns out to be the life of the intellect, in which the “moral” and other virtues play a role. The human intellect, knowledge and choices are aspects of a more complex entity (the whole human being), which has complex needs and functions.

“More than two thousand years ago Aristotle was keenly aware that the inability to think and act value-rationally could seriously impair the social and physical existence of individuals and communities in this world. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle discussed the social role of what he called ‘intellectual virtues’ and focused, in particular, on the three virtues he called ‘*episteme*’, ‘*techne*’, and ‘*phronesis*’. It is interesting and perhaps telling to note that the terms *episteme* and *techne* are still found in current language, for instance in the words epistemology and epistemic, technology and technical, whereas *phronesis*, (relating to what is good for humanity) has no direct modern counterpart. Thinkers as different as Weber, Foucault, and Habermas have pointed out that for more than two centuries instrumental rationality has increasingly dominated value rationality, leading to what has been called the civilization of means without ends.” (Flyvbjerg 1993: 12)

“Life as activity coupled with reason and thinking is to be called life to a fuller extent,” says Aristotle (1988:18). “If then the human function is the soul's activity that expresses reason; the superior or excellent performing of this function expresses the true virtue of a good human. Virtue then is of two sorts, virtue of thought and virtue of character.” Therefore the virtues of thought and character are the unique essence of humankind but, especially important for Aristotle, is man's special capabilities for reasoning. “Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching, and hence needs experience and time.” The virtue of thought has three dimensions. Firstly, it is based on individual capacity (genetics), secondly, it develops with teaching and experience (circumstantial) and, thirdly, it is a function of time, which suggests growth to maturity over one's lifespan.

“Virtue of character results from habit. Habit is the key to a virtuous life.” Aristotle went out of his way not only to convince us of this fact, but also to teach us the mechanics or methodology of forming good habits. We ultimately become by doing. Everything that we are starts with our nature or capacity, which is not dependent on habit. Habit can only follow nature or capacity. “Virtues, by contrast, we acquire, just as we acquire crafts, by having previously activated them,” That is to say, by learning and doing them. Habits are the key to vice and virtue. It is of utmost importance in every sphere of life, from child rearing to politics. “To sum up, then, in a single account: A state of character arises from the repetition of similar activities. Hence, we must display the right activities, since differences in these imply corresponding differences in states. It is not unimportant then, to acquire one sort of habit or another, right from your youth; rather, it is very important, indeed all-important.” “The right habituation is what makes the difference between a good political system and a bad one.” Aristotle wants us to grasp that you only become by doing, by habit, there is no other way. “For no one has even a prospect of becoming good from failing to do them.” To live virtuously requires habituation and therefore requires practice, not just theory or beliefs! “The many, however, do not do these actions but take refuge in arguments, thinking that they are doing philosophy, and that it is the way to become excellent people. In this they are like a sick person who listens attentively to the doctor, but acts on none of his instructions. Such a course of treatment will not improve the state of his body any more than will the many’s way of doing philosophy, improve the state of their souls.” Therefore doing and practicing morally correct acts until they become habits will reflect your virtuous character and exhibit your spirituality to others, while faith and arguments only show your theoretical, theological opinions. If ever there was an apt piece of advice, or of practical philosophy, for all times that could bring meaning and structure to individuals, society and religion, it is this simple truth. This is the basis of commonsense living for all people and societies. The right virtuous and moral practices make the individual and therefore, the citizen and state, perfect.

To my mind it is imperative that one distinguishes between laws, civil order and justice; ethics, which is societal or group rules for ordering actions between people; etiquette, which prescribes rules for good manners; morality, which comes from within, based on love as compassion and sensitivity, it functions intuitively, a way of seeing things that can become a way of life, the internal law that needs no other external laws. Equating morality to conformation to laws is conceptually and factually wrong. One relates to obedience and discipline, the other to an inner conviction. Paul also had great difficulties to explain this fact. The solution for the ordinary citizen seems to go back to the Aristotelian recipe of building character and integrity through habit, to the example of the virtuous, practical, intelligent, wise role model, since moral excellence remains rare.

One of the major dilemmas in modern life is the absence of proper and functional role models or heroes, which are necessary to portray the desired virtues of society in a practical and obvious way. The impotence of societies and cultures as well as the formal religions to influence moral behaviour in societies is coupled to this problem. Unconditional freedom granted to immature people, or alternatively motivation by fear and superstition, does not produce rational, self-disciplined, virtuous, loving and balanced people with character integrity. The practical wise and loving person must again become a hero, an ideal, which must be cultivated through loving education and discipline to foster mature, responsible and morally integrated persons. This training and education will of necessity include practising discretion, good judgment and moral deeds to the point of habituation, which will leave the mind free for productive thinking and creative functions.

There is no shortcut therefore, to realise a decent moral society we need the active participation of the state, society and individual citizens. Confucius, Aristotle and Socrates knew that intent must be followed by appropriate effort, sustained by discipline, which eventually has to mature into self-discipline and hopefully, moral behaviour. A superior state needs superior citizens. Knowledge, wisdom and a virtuous moral character are the result of dedicated, serious and disciplined effort, within a coherent plan. Political posturing,

slogans or mere dogmatic, theoretical religious beliefs, of which we have more than enough, are useless in practice, other than for endless arguments and power games. Furthermore, Aristotle states, that aimless acting “tinkering”, and playful action as well as recreation, cannot compensate for a lack of meaning: “An unplanned life is not worth examining.” In its collective form it will also result in an undisciplined, haphazard society where higher values cannot develop and eventually will result in a society that is unfit for decent human living. The happy man is the wise one whose intelligence is his most perfect characteristic and whose knowledge is his most excellent condition, and compassion rules his relationships.

Further relevant quotations of Aristotle about virtue and spirituality:

- Improve yourself for your own sake, and people will follow you.
- The unreal is what does not exist at all; the untrue is what is either exaggerated or understated.
- Decency is not cheating anyone, and intelligence is not being cheated by anyone.
- Aristotle wrote to Alexander, “God distributed gifts among peoples, giving bravery to the Persians, horsemanship to the Eastern Tribes, artistry to the Byzantines, and subtlety and philosophy to the Indians.”
- Make your life in this world a defence for your afterlife; do not make your afterlife a defence for your life in this world.
- One last word from Confucius to show the harmony in thought of these two masters: “With wisdom the end and virtue the means, the course of life is clarified and the mind freed from distress and conflicting opinions of schoolmen and the obstinate absurdities of theologians” (Hall 1965: 120)

4.3.1.3 Socrates

Socrates had a profound influence on the thinking of Plato and many other later philosophers. It is to be remembered that Socrates’ ideas, like those of Jesus, depend wholly on the reports of others because both wrote nothing that survived. In Socrates’ case, Plato himself was the main correspondent of his

philosophical ideas. Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, says that he himself lacked the aptitude for cosmology (natural science) so he decided early in his life to devote himself to discovering what was good for human life, or what was good for the soul. However one needs to take note that he did so without invoking formal religion or theology. We must look at Socrates from two different vantage points, the one being his philosophy and the other his life as example of his philosophy.

“Socrates was the first to treat the soul not only as the source of life and motion, as was the general Greek belief, but also as the intelligence or mind of a person. One’s mind needs to direct one’s life course in harmony with one’s conscience, and Socrates thought of his ‘conscience’ as the voice of the god within, which mind must heed, therefore, man’s soul or life-force is closely bound to one’s mind. The Sophists in turn, were by and large teachers of rhetoric and the art of persuasion without reference to truth or justice, while Socrates teaches the important of morals and virtue as a matter of principle.” (Jaspers 1957:7)

To him it was not only necessary to know what was good or beneficial for the care of the soul, but also that virtue was a kind of knowledge. It cannot be conferred on one person by another but must be achieved by a personal search and realisation. So Socrates said that all knowledge necessary for the caring of the soul starts with self-knowledge, from where you broaden your field of search for necessary relations and correlations. We will meet with this important notion again when we discuss the Gnostic philosophy.

From his own success with the inward journey and “in obedience to the gods” he accepted the task of making his fellow citizens aware of their ignorance of themselves and the proper way for human beings to live. Socrates’ method of teaching by questions and answers leads to puzzlement (*aporia*). To be an ardent seeker of the truth is the most basic but also most essential qualification in the spiritual quest. In this respect Jesus would have been in total harmony with him, especially in his mystical teachings from the Gospel of Thomas. “Socrates does not resolve the questions for them by telling them what is

beneficial to human life, they must arrive at their own answers, through knowledge and insight, for it is this kind of knowledge which changes a person in the very acquisition of it. He taught people to discover the difficulties in the seemingly self-evident (unquestioned traditions, taken as truths); he confused them, forced them to think, to search, to inquire over and over again, and not to sidestep the answer, and this truthful persons could bear because they were convinced that truth is what joins virtuous men together. He was sure that the untruth of the present state of affairs, regardless of whether the form of government is democratic or aristocratic or tyrannical, couldn't be remedied by great political actions. No improvement is possible unless the individual is educated by educating himself, unless his hidden being is awakened to reality through insight, which is at the same time inner action, a knowledge which is at the same time a virtue. He who becomes a true man becomes a true citizen, but apart from his success and usefulness in the state, the individual is important for his own sake. The independence that comes of self-mastery (*eukrateia*), the true freedom which grows with knowledge – these are the ultimate foundations on which a man can face the godhead. The significance of Socrates' approach is that one must know one's ignorance and embark on a journey of thought. From perplexity grows insight." (Jaspers. 1957: 7, 8) This truth we will encounter again in an interesting quote from the sayings of Jesus as reported by Thomas.

The essential for man is to risk living as though he knew that good exists. (Pascal's wager) "Socrates' absolute authority he calls either the true, the good or reason. What should be done in concrete, unique situations, where man cannot always decide by reason alone? Then, he said, the Gods come to our help, firstly in the form of an inner 'voice' which always forbids him to do things that will have evil consequences, but never commands and, secondly, if this voice does not help, obedience, without understanding, to one's religious and civil traditions, in their interpretation of the will of the gods, and to the laws of the state." (Jaspers 1957:10) Note the order of responsibility for your decisions. Firstly, your own reason based on knowledge, then your inner voice, and only lastly when in total perplexity, the cultural and religious tradition, the laws of the state and of religion.

Socrates was bound to make enemies of enough pompous, ignorant power mongers in government and religion to silence his campaign of knowledge and personal responsibility. He questioned unremittingly; he drove his listeners to the basic problems and questions life, but did not answer it for them. Compare Jesus in Thomas: "Let him who seeks not cease in his seeking until he finds; and when he finds, he will be troubled, and if he is troubled, he will marvel, and will rule over All." (Saying two). Again, "Do you know the beginning that you ask about the end?" (Saying eighteen) Again, "Know what is in front of your face and the hidden knowledge will be revealed to you." (Saying five)

The confusion that follows the consciousness awareness of ignorance and the feeling of humiliation, together with the challenge to change their attitudes, created anger and hatred amongst the "powerful ones". Socrates knew that it only takes a few powerful and prominent men to agree on certain things and any further learning comes to a halt, because the "truth was now proclaimed" and accepted by the masses as "Gospel or Law".

So Socrates was charged and tried in the year 399 B.C.E. on charges "of violating the laws; for he does not believe in the gods of our country and of observing a faith in a new kind of demon, and leading the youth astray." God, says Socrates, had bidden him to spend his life delving into himself for truth as well as in other people. This is his main point of defence, "I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice of philosophy, exhorting anyone whom I meet and saying to him after my manner, 'you my friend...are you not ashamed, to care so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement (that) of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all?' " (Jaspers, 1957: 12)

First of all we must realise that Socrates, like Jesus, is a real and not a mythical or legendary hero. Socrates is a martyr of philosophy and authentic morality, a victim of religious and political conspiracies. His death became a judicial murder at the hands of the Athenian "religious" democracy. He had no new god; it was just that he experienced the will of God in his truthful

quest for knowledge, wisdom and spiritual development. He refused to make his peace with the unwise and unwritten conventions of the community. He was offered a number of ways out of jail but refused to take advantage of them because he would not break the laws of his country, even if they were unjustly applied. Neither was he going to agree to a compromise on his philosophy or accept exile and be silenced by others in his life task. By not compromising, he wilfully brought on his own death, and so did Jesus centuries later, as philosopher and prophet for the spiritual kingdom of God.

“Socrates died without fear or remorse. He worked it out for himself and his followers that those who fear death imagine that they know what no one really knows. Perhaps it is the greatest good fortune, but they fear it as if they know it is the greatest evil. The possibilities can be appraised: either death is equivalent to nothingness, without sensation of anything at all, like a dreamless sleep; then eternity seems no longer than a single night. Or else death is the migration of the soul to another place, where all the dead are gathered, where righteous judges speak the truth, where we shall meet with those who have been unjustly sentenced and done to death, where men live on, in dialogue, still seeking to ascertain who is wise, and we shall enjoy the indescribable bliss of speaking with the best of men. Whatever the truth about death may be, for a good man, he was convinced there is no evil, neither in life nor in death.” (Jaspers, 1957: 14)

In demonstrating the immortality of the soul, which to Socrates “is beyond any doubt”, he seems to be saying, according to Jaspers, “that all peace of mind is based on such certainty. However, freedom from doubt has its source in righteous action and the search for truth. A certainty based on rational proof is no secure possession, and indeed, Socrates speaks expressly of the ‘venture’ of living in the hope of immortality. For ideas of immortality from ‘a fully justified faith, worthy that we venture to devote ourselves to it. For the venture is beautiful and peace of mind demands such ideas, which work like magic incantations’.

“Socrates died without defiance or blame. ‘I am not angry with my condemners or my accusers’ – this was his last words. He was convinced that for a good man there could be no evil; his cause will not be neglected by the gods. But if his wrongdoers, ‘think that by killing men you can prevent someone from censuring your evil lives, you are mistaken.’ ” (Jaspers, 1957: 13, 14)

“Here we find an imperative without fanaticism, the highest aspiration without ethical dogma. Keep yourself open for the absolute. Until you achieve it, do not throw yourself away, for in it you can live and die in peace. It is through thought and contemplation that those who felt the impact of Socrates became different men. Through Socrates, thought manifested itself with the highest claims, involving the greatest of dangers. But, unfortunately, immediately after his death, fragmentation set in; each one of his many followers began to think in a different way. Each one seems to have supposed that he possessed Socrates’ thought, while no one had it. Many different schools claimed to be the true followers of the hero.” (Jaspers, 1957: 17) The same process will repeat itself after the death of Jesus or, for that matter, any other great philosopher or saint. To the Church Fathers, Socrates was a great figure, a precursor of the Christian martyrs. Like them he died for his beliefs and like them he was accused of blasphemy against the traditional religion. He was even mentioned in the same breath as Christ, Justin, Tatian, Origen, Theodoret and even Augustine praised him.

“Where the influence of Socrates is felt, men convince themselves in freedom; they do not subscribe to articles of faith. Here we find friendship in the movement of truth, not sectarianism in dogma. In the clarity of human possibility, Socrates meets the other as an equal. He wants no disciples. And for the same reason he likes to neutralize his overwhelming personality by speaking ironically of himself.” (Jaspers, 1957: 21) Like the Buddha he does not indulge in metaphysics and theology and rejects all speculation on supernatural means of salvation. He just knows that the true and the good man, who lives by reason and the inner “voice” is in harmony with the God and needs not fear death.

4.3.2 The Predominantly Metaphysical Philosophers

These philosophers have an “aptitude” for the spiritual or religious life. We begin with Plato and then look at some other philosophies, ending with Pythagoras, because his philosophy of life forms an excellent bridge to explain the classical links between philosophy and the Mysteries.

4.3.2.1 Plato

Why then was Plato, a great admirer of Socrates, and the one who actually ensured that we could enjoy the company of this Greek hero, so intent on indulging in speculative “heavenly” philosophy? I think we can find the answer in the summary which Noss (1980:53) gave us about Plato’s philosophical quest, as a concerned intellectual in a predominantly superstitious culture. According to him, Plato was weary of the ill effects of the myths and mythic gods on the minds of children. Furthermore, he questioned and opposed the concept that atonement for sins can be obtained by sacrifices. Plato was far from denying the existence of the gods but the concepts and understanding about the gods needed an urgent facelift. The Gods on their part, he was sure, desire none of the superstitious worship, and neither the magical rituals that men developed in their honour. They desire and expect only that each man shall engage in the proper tendance of his soul and seek the supreme good that the high God has set before them. Firm in these beliefs, Plato in old age contended that atheism or any assertion that God is indifferent to men or can be bought off by gifts, offerings and sacrifices should be treated as dangerous to society. Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Neo-Platonists were as much emancipated as Plato from the confining bonds within (superstition) which their lesser countrymen were battling with while they strained towards a fuller, freer life and greater wisdom.

Plato wanted to reform the outdated religious concepts of his day. True morality is thus not the product of convention or arbitrary enactment of human will, but the virtuous individual is a counterpart in miniature of the order and

harmony of the cosmos. Plato explains in the *Timaeus*, “The father and maker of all this universe is past finding out, and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would be impossible.” (28c). The physical universe is always changing, nonetheless, it is marvellously organised and stable in its motions. It must therefore be the result of intelligence and goodness and its order and stability the result of being a copy of something, which is unchanging, an ideal pattern that is graspable by the intellect. This is Plato’s famous world of Forms. The motive in making the universe must have been to make it as orderly as possible, both as a whole and in every detail, so that it is a series of sub-orders, fitting into larger and larger wholes. It is clear that in this creation story there is no creation ‘ex nihilo.’ It is a story of order being brought to pre-existing material.

In Plato’s account, matter places limitations on the “demiurge” or craftsman who brings order out of chaos – that is, the Demiurge or Creator, is a lesser heavenly power who tries to copy the perfect “world of forms” of the Most High God as faithfully as possible. There is, unfortunately, inherent in matter itself and through its own motion, a “variable” element – also thought by Plato as having an unpredictability or “irrationality” or “chance” element. Plato writes “Mind, the ruling power, persuaded necessity to bring the greater part of created things to perfection... But if a person will truly tell of the way in which the work was accomplished, he must include the variable (change/irrational) cause as well and explain its influence.” (*Timaeus*, 48a) “Thus, ‘Mind’ turns chaos into a cosmos, or chaos into orderly, predictable motion. But reason or mind or the craftsman can never fully reduce matter to perfect order. The ‘variable cause’ – matter’s inherent irrationality (rather unpredictability) cannot be completely overcome. The sensible world is forever inferior to the world of Forms. Clearly, for Plato, this world is good, even though it is not perfect. But equally clearly, the disorderly element of blind necessity is never completely mastered by the Mind which designed the world, and the “world soul” which governs its motions in the heavens. So the natural evils and imperfections of the physical world are a result of matter. Christianity on the other hand, affirms the goodness of the material world and blames all evil on man and the devil.” (Allen, 1985:19)

“Plato’s understanding of the nature and destiny of the soul is that the soul has fallen into a sensible world, and it must return to the super sensible world if it is to attain its proper destiny. The sensible world with its capacity to gratify our sensuous desires must be shunned, or the soul will be diverted from its destiny. But as far as the physical universe itself is concerned, matter’s resistance to being reduced to perfect order does not prevent the world from being fair and beautiful. Plato’s view is by no means that of Genesis, but it is not the total rejection of the world by the Gnostics and Manicheans” (Allen, 1985:30).

“Therefore, Plato’s story of creation, his myth, or as he calls it, ‘a likely story’, is Plato’s view of forms, which is one of the most difficult parts of his philosophy to understand; it is the forms or ideas of things, which serve as templates or plans for the sensible worldly creations. Plato’s *Timaeus* was adapted for Christian use by the identification of the forms with the ‘divine mind’. This was first done by the Middle Platonists in the first century B.C. Many Christian theologians followed their lead in this matter. The pre-existent matter was taken care of by the Christian view of creation *ex nihilo*.

“The consequences of this identification of the forms with the ‘divine mind’ for theology and indeed for the development of modern science were immense. The attraction was that it meant that Plato’s concepts of the universe, with an apparently very slight change, could become Christianised as a reflection of the Mind of God, instead of a reflection of the world of forms. It therefore suggests that one could get a considerable understanding of God from a study of the created universe, vindicating the Bible, and on the other hand, the integrity of natural things is provided for because although they reflect the mind of God they are not a part of God. In Plato’s argument, the ‘most high’ unknowable God designs the Forms or Paradigm for creation and a lesser god does the crafting or creation, while in the Christian version it is also the unknowable, transcendental God that designed, but it is the ‘Mind of God’, ‘Wisdom of God’ or ‘Logos’ which created the world.” (Allen, 1985:26)

Plato writes in the "Sophist" (265 c, e): "Does nature bring forth (animals, plants and lifeless substances) from self-acting causes without creative intelligence; or are they from reason and divine knowledge? I will only lay it down (not argue for it) that the products of nature, as they are called, are works of divine art, as things made out of them by man are works of human art." Here we can already see the elements of the still ongoing debate of our times of evolution by chance or creation by design! It is very interesting to note how Plato understands his own convictions. He is pretty sure in his mind about the fact that the designs come from the Father of all things, who is beyond us, meaning beyond our finite understanding but he knows full well that this statement of his is in the category of beliefs, not facts, for he "will only lay it down" as a presupposition and not argue for it or try to prove it. Furthermore, he acknowledges that the rest of his story of creation, about the craftsman or demiurge, is a "likely story", "mythos" not "logos"! This is precisely the difference between a philosopher and a literal biblical fundamentalist or a theologian, who will take the outer or literal myth, as historical, inspired and absolute facts. For Plato and other philosophers, myth is a literary tool, to explain complex spiritual truths in a symbolic way and that it will be understood variously according to intellectual, moral and spiritual maturity. Instead of mythical tradition, the philosophers report "their own views" on the grounds that they are the most reasonable interpretations of their observations of man. It becomes a problem when we try to freeze time related knowledge into "final" divine revelations and then classify it as undisputable "eternal knowledge".

Plato is assisted in his understanding of that knowledge, which benefits the soul, by his knowledge of Pythagorean teaching. The soul, according to the Pythagoreans and to Orphism, is a fallen god imprisoned in the body. It is pre-existent and undying, and by purification can escape reincarnation and return to its proper place. Plato shared with Socrates the belief that the sensible world is the result of benevolent intelligence. Plato's tales are told in mythical form, often using Orphic or Pythagorean as well as Hermetic material, but he does not simply adopt these notions uncritically. He gives his

own reasons for his convictions (he argues for it instead of simply believing in it). Thus it is essential for us to turn from the sensible world, literally a change in our inner being (*metanoia*) and to search for knowledge (*gnosis*) of the super sensible reality on which this world depends. Philosophy for Plato, as for the ancient philosophers, is thus a way of life.

“How is the soul to make this journey? How are we to find what is truly good? Love is our great assistant. Plato devotes two major dialogues, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, and an early one, *Lysis*, to the subject of love. In the *Phaedrus* he uses the image of the soul as a charioteer drawn by two horses, a white and a black one. The soul is considered to have three distinct aspects: intelligence, the charioteer which guides a person; honourable desires and appetites, the white horse, and dishonourable desires and appetites, the black horse. The horses have wings and fly through sky to an opening in the dome (representing the border of the natural cosmos) to see the heavens. Since horses have contrary desires it is difficult for the charioteer to manage them to get high enough for a proper glimpse of the genuine reality beyond. The black horse has to be controlled to make the journey to the spiritual realm. The lower part of the soul must be guided by intelligence if we are to avoid being dominated by sensuous pleasures. The middle part is described as the concern for honour, social prestige, the pleasure we gain from applause (Ego gratification). Prestige should be based on true merit and honour – not hypocrisy or to seek social approval from those who have no discrimination or who admire power and wealth above all. The middle part is called the spirited part and also needs guidance from the mind. To give guidance, the mind, which is the highest part of the soul, must know what is good for the soul as a whole, and how this good is to be sought, and how to apply this knowledge to all the exigencies of life.” (Allen, 1985: 45)

Two levels and kinds of education are needed, of which the second level has two tiers. Level one consists largely of training, the other is called dialectic. This suggests that the virtues exhibited by people are largely the result of disciplined training, and not the result of own knowledge of the basis, or foundation of virtue, which already is an advanced form of training for those

who have mastered self-discipline. They become the leaders and teachers, but it further means that for the proper conduct of life, based on the virtues and on discipline, even the knowledge and understanding of the basis and nature of virtue do not represent the highest good for the soul. Balanced, moral and spiritual development for the benefit of the soul is the highest goal, so that the enlightened soul can mature to spiritual beauty and return to its real home, with the Gods. (Salvation) "The Form of the Good in the world of Forms plays the same role as the sun in the world of senses. The Form of the Good gives the objects of the intellect their truth, the power of knowing. What we need then is conversion. We need to be turned from sensible objects, which are not true objects of knowledge, to what can be grasped by the mind. One is progressively to renounce the delights of this world, to be 'dead' to their allure." (Allen 1985:48, 54) Essentially, it means to search for the Truth, based on the Good and from the inner Beauty of true vision, knowledge and compassion; the real fruits of the victory over the selfish ego, by the composite, universal Self.

"From Descartes' 'Discourse on method' he reckons that everyone's intellect is by nature adequate to perceive truth. Ignorance and error are caused primarily by prejudice produced by custom and sense experience that impede our vision. If one methodically clears them away, the intellect is able to 'see' or intuit truth, just as the eye can see. This is also the journey from illusion to reality in Plato's account of the way to salvation. The soul, for Plato, is fully real although it changes. Neither the dogmatic asceticism nor self-sufficiency of Diogenes the Cynic, nor "shame over having a body" – Plotinus; nor hatred of the body as evil, of some Christians and Gnostics, is justifiable from Plato's views of the soul. Plato's conviction that the soul does not die with the body, is a moral one. Evil must be punished and cannot be 'escaped' by dying. Justice is fundamental to Plato and the soul will have to face judgment after death. We shall be rewarded or punished on the basis of how we lived. This moral conviction was worked up into an explicit argument many years later by Kant. Plato also believes that even in this life the unjust person becomes a slave to the passions, but that a just person has self-mastery and cannot be injured in the depths of the soul by external things. Plato also believed that

since the higher part of the soul knows the Forms, we have an essential kinship with them, and thus share something of their permanent and unchanging nature, but is unsure whether the rest of our soul, middle and lower, also shares in this immortality.” (Allen, 1985: 58)

4.3.2.2 Stoicism

Stoicism was perhaps the major philosophical force in the Roman Empire. The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, reputed to have been a wise man, was himself a Stoic and may have been the nearest to Plato’s ideal of a real “Philosopher King” since Solomon. Like much else, the Romans had been exposed to Stoic philosophy by their contact with the Greeks. In many ways, says Zoller(1988:1), the story of Stoicism is a story of how Semitic, in this case Phoenician, and Indo-European philosophical influences merged to produce a highly sophisticated and elevating system of thought that, in many ways, profoundly influenced Christianity and even our own civilization up to today.

Zeno, (b.ca.336 B.C.E.), was the originator of Stoicism. Like Socrates Antithenes, Zeno’s mentor, thought that speculative philosophy was unproductive of real Good. One had to live philosophically. Unlike Socrates, Antithenes stressed the idea of extreme simplicity of living. (Zoller 1988:1)

“The Stoic doctrine is divided into three parts: logic, physics and ethics, but Stoicism is essentially a system of ethics which, however, is guided by logic as theory of method and rests upon physics as foundation. Briefly, their notion of morality is stern, involving a life in accordance with nature and controlled by virtue. It is a type of ascetic system, teaching perfect indifference to everything external and beyond your control, for nothing external could be either good or evil because these terms are usually invoked by one’s subjective judgment of good and evil, which is in relation to one’s own perceptions and agenda. The Stoic logic is essentially Aristotelian, to which they added a theory, peculiar to themselves, about the origin of knowledge and the criterion of truth. The mind is a blank slate upon which

sense impressions are inscribed. It may have a certain activity of its own, but this activity is confined exclusively to materials supplied by the physical organs of sense and then processed. Our knowledge of particular objects is therefore based on sense perception, as is our knowledge of our mental states and activities, our soul itself being a material thing.

“Borrowing from Heraclitus, the Stoics identified the active principle of reality with the Logos, Reason, or God. Unlike later Christian versions, the Stoic view of the Logos is both materialistic and pantheistic. God has no existence distinct from the rational order of nature and should not be construed as a personal, transcendent deity of the sort essential to later Western theism. The Stoics were determinists, even fatalists, holding that whatever happens is necessary because God, and therefore nature, always has the greater picture or the interest of the Whole in mind. Not only is the world such that all events are determined by prior events, but the universe is a perfect, rational whole. For all their interest in logic and speculative philosophy, the primary focus of Stoicism is practical and ethical. Knowledge of nature is of instrumental and practical value only; its value is entirely determined by its role in fostering a life of virtue, understood as living in accord with nature. This practical aspect of Stoicism is especially prevalent in the Roman Stoic, Epictetus (c50 - 138 C.E.), who developed the ethical and religious side of Stoicism.

“Stoicism teaches that it is very important that we should attune to our inner nature. The Romans called it ‘Reason’, the Chinese the ‘Tao’, and the Greeks the ‘Logos’. To sum up this important philosophy we can say that Stoicism teaches:

- One to live in accord with Nature; worldly Nature and human nature.
- The Unity of All; all gods; all substance; all virtue; all mankind into a Cosmo-Polis (Universal City).
- That the external world is maintained by the natural interchange of opposites (poioun/yin, paskhon/yang).
- That everyone has a personal, individual connection to the All; a god within.

- That every soul has Free Will to act and that the action of the soul is opinion.
- Simple living through moderation and frugality.
- That spiritual growth comes from seeking the good.
- That Virtue is the sole good, vice the sole evil, and everything else indifferent.
- That the cardinal virtues are Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance.
- That the Path to personal happiness and inner peace is through the extinguishing of all desires to have or to affect things beyond one's control and through living for the present without hope for or fear of the future; beyond the power of opinion.
- The sequential re-absorption and recreation of the Universe by the Central Fire; the Conflagration.
- It is irrational to want that which is not God's will, so attune thyself with thy inner Nature and live happily. Live according to your own Nature". (www.geocities.com/stoicism)

While it differed from Christianity in fundamental ways (it was materialistic and pantheistic), nonetheless Christianity defined itself in an intellectual environment pervaded by Stoic ideas of the Logos. Furthermore, for much of modern Western history, Stoic ideas of moral virtue have been second to none in influence. Stoic ideas regarding the natural order of things and the belief that each rational soul has a divine element provided a basis upon which later ideas of natural law were established.

Paul grew up in a provincial capital Tarsus, which had a famous Stoic university and the city was virtually managed by this institution. Furthermore, Tarsus, according to Ulansey (1989:75), was the birthplace of the "western" and very popular strain of the Mysteries of Mithras, which in Paul's time would most probably have been the dominant mystery religion of Tarsus. "Kant's conception of the pre-eminent value of the Good Will and the moral indifference of external circumstances, though not entirely Stoic" says Connolly (2001:1), "shows the influence of Stoicism. In addition, Spinoza's

conception of the promotion of the active over and against the passive emotions further reflects the pervasive influence of Stoic ideas. The notion of virtue as conforming to the rational order of things suggests the Christian idea of conforming one's will to divine providence. The influence of Stoicism on subsequent Western ethical and religious thought testifies to its continuing importance".

4.3.2.3 The Middle Platonists and Plotinus

"The middle Platonists also viewed the human soul as belonging to another realm but 'fallen' into the sense-world. The object of life is to purify the soul by philosophy so that we can return to a disembodied life which is the spiritual realm. They place the Supreme Mind as the supreme power of the hierarchy of beings. The Platonists, and Plotinus after them, sought to reconcile Plato and Aristotle and took some of the latter's features of the unmoved mover and applied them to their Supreme Mind. The Supreme Mind is absolutely free from all external activities and they exalted it to such a height that it has no direct contact with the material world. It is aware only of its own thought as it engages in perpetual contemplation. It affects what is outside itself only indirectly through intermediaries. One can see the possibility of an enormous increase or an inflation of intermediary powers between Supreme Mind and the sensible world.

"Plotinus, as a Platonist, believed the soul to be divine and the object of life is to understand how we may restore the soul to its proper place in the heavenly realm. This can be done by comprehensive knowledge of reality and our place in it. Unlike the Christians, Plotinus shares the conviction of the Greek philosophers that human beings have the power to gain a satisfactory knowledge of all reality, including divine things, because human beings are partly divine by nature and like can know like. Thus, access to divine things is possible without revelation. To know that reality for him, as for Plato, requires purification and virtue, and not just mental ability". (Allen 1985:74)

Mind emanates outward from the One automatically and has the potential to know and its contemplation or thought is intuitive. Man's soul can conceptually be divided into two parts. The "higher" Soul and mind of man can under suitable conditions reach the influence sphere of Mind (God) and can therefore communicate, and it even can rise in self-transcendence to union with the One or All. The lower soul is the soul-body complex, which needs to be governed by the mind-Mind complex. Discursive thought is at the level of the Soul, in which objects are known, and is successively handled by the mind. An important statement often found in mystical traditions is that the "life of Mind is at rest". Jesus, in the Gospel of Thomas Saying 50, said to his disciples, "If they say to you, who you are? Say we are his sons, and we are the elect of the living Father. If they ask you, what is the sign of your Father who is within you? Say to them, it is movement and rest." When the Mind (God) has a vision of the truth he has it all at once, rather than having thought after thought, like the soul. The level of Mind for Plotinus is thus "noesis", or the realm of intuitive knowledge, in which the Forms are grasped all at once in a flash.

"Plotinus describes the uses of the term Logos as often meaning, in Greek philosophy, the active, formative principle of something. Plotinus retains this but speaks of logos also as an expression, image, or representation of a higher level of reality operating on a lower level. Plotinus said that to know the operation of the higher soul and its relation with Mind as well as the body-soul complex (lower soul) is to realise that you are part of the All and to contemplate the soul's proper relation to the All and become ever more intimately identified with the All; unified with the All should be the object of life. From this first level of union it is possible to reach the final vision and the subsequent union with the One or the Good for Plotinus. This is a mystical experience. This uniting with the Good is possible because our intellect perfectly conforms to it, it was made like it. This conformity is achieved by love. This state of love is destined to the state of knowing. (Plato's divine Madness) The mind (higher Soul united with Mind), in love, thus attains self-transcendence and is united with the One by love. Mind is eternally and unchangeably in two states simultaneously, one 'sober' and one 'drunk', one

knowing and one loving. It eternally pursues its proper activity of knowing while it is eternally raised above itself in the union of love with the One. The philosopher who has attained the level of contemplation of the Forms by 'looking upward' or by 'looking inward' (both are the same because they involve turning one's attention away from the world of sense as the object of interest and desires) and who is thus not just knowing 'about' the Forms, can by love, experience the ecstatic union with the One or Good, being joined to the eternal and unchanging love of Mind for the One. This final goal (unity-salvation) can be reached while still in the body on earth. After death (the permanent break-up of the soul-body complex) the higher soul is permanently in its proper place with no representation at a lower level. We are to seek to live even in embodiment as though we were out of the body, which is to live detached from material and earthly desires. Plotinus himself had an intense and immediate sense of the splendour, strength and solidity of spiritual reality." (Allen 1985:81)

"Augustine was one of the great Christian Platonists. He and Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394 C.E.), as well as other theologians of the fourth and fifth century, used the ideas of Plotinus about the three divine hypostases to gain a deeper understanding of God. They made modifications to Plotinus, because the Christian doctrine of creation made it impossible to think of them as 'degrees' of divinity. There is a sharp division between the Creator and all else in Christianity. One is either divine or not divine at all – hence the insistence on the 'only' Son of God and the Arian controversies that wanted to explain Jesus as a lesser form of divinity than the father. We have a perverted nature and therefore because of our sinful state there is an absolute necessity of God's grace. This marks an unbridgeable chasm between Christianity and Plotinus" says Allen, "and indeed all Hellenistic philosophies and religions, which view the human soul as essentially divine and merely caught or trapped somehow in the sensible world." (Allen 1985:82)

The fact is that Christianity did not, to the best of my knowledge, explain the concepts involved, or the process of "receiving the Holy Spirit", or of Paul's "Christ within", or to be "in the likeness and image of God", or Jesus'

“children of God”, or “the Father within”, to really contrast the ideas of the “divinity within” of the philosophers to that of Christianity, to warrant their claim to uniqueness on this point.

The Christians applied much of Plotinus’ concepts to God as Trinity. Christian theologians make special use of use of Mind, by applying it to the second person, the Son. The Son is the Divine Wisdom through whom all created beings are made and in whom the Forms – the exemplars of all created things – are present. This represents a radical difference from the Old Testament, where Wisdom represents God’s thoughts and not a separate Incarnation of Himself. To Plotinus, our restoration or salvation is thus simply a move from being ‘potentially’ like God to become ‘actually’ like God. That is, we actually can know the forms (Gods will, Gods paradigm) intuitively; by ruling lovingly over our lower self and creation, we can move progressively into union with the One. In Christianity, although we are made in the “image and likeness” of God this fact, somehow, does not count for much. Because of Adam and Eve, we are all doomed, only Jesus is divine and human but nobody explains when he is wearing which hat and why. Thus he becomes the “mediator” between us and God as well as in our relationship to God, which is now only through the cosmic Christ (if you do not belong to the Roman Catholic Church, when it seems to be a little more complicated because the Church is somehow also critically involved) and this relationship is only established by “faith” in this mediation, won through divine sacrifice, which apparently then results in us obtaining grace because Jesus then became “The Christ”, dying only for our blessed hopelessness. Plotinus’ hypostases, as well as the distinction of lower and higher souls or selves, albeit imaginative, at least try to explain the God-man relationship as well as the dualistic human reality more clearly than “primordial sin-blood-sacrifice-grace-Christianity” from a logical and experiential, or mystical point of view. It is actually amazing that the whole Christian soteriology is based on a literally interpreted myth. The result of “designing” mankind different to the angels, with freedom of choice and then condemning man and all life with him to everlasting death and damnation for striving to know certain things, which then resulted in the

so-called primordial, unforgivable, but typically youthful “sin” that needed special divine intervention.

With the background we have acquired up to now it should be clear that you do not necessarily need revealed sacred scripts to be a good moral person or even to be a profoundly spiritual human being. Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus are prime examples of this category of reasonable spirituality. But before we come to the early Christian movements we still need to investigate a very popular “world wide” religious movement, which was generally called “The Mysteries”, and the philosophies of Pythagoras as well as that of Apollonius. We also must investigate the Gnostic phenomenon because of its importance to Christianity. We will look at Pythagoras first because his philosophy and theology are combined in a typical “philosophic-mystery movement”, later taken further by Plato and others, while it also could serve as an introduction to the more standard or mass movements of a “mystery-philosophy movement” construct. Please note the reversibility of the linked concepts of philosophy and mysteries; the interchangeable sequential use indicates their relative importance in a particular movement, whether it is primarily a philosophical movement with a metaphysical or religious slant, or vice versa.

4.3.2.4 Pythagoras

This most famous philosopher was born sometime between 600 and 590 B.C.E., and the length of his life has been estimated at nearly one hundred years. The teachings of Pythagoras indicate that he was thoroughly conversant with the precepts of Oriental and Occidental esotericism. Hall (1977:LXVI) says that he travelled among the Jews and was instructed by the Rabbis concerning the secret traditions of Moses, the lawgiver of Israel, and that later the School of the Essenes used and interpreted the Pythagorean symbols in their own esoteric teachings. Pythagoras was initiated into the Egyptian, Babylonian, and Chaldean Mysteries. Although it is believed by some that he was a disciple of Zoroaster, it is doubtful whether his instructor of that name was the God-man now revered by the Parsees. While accounts of his travels

differ, historians agree that he visited many countries and studied at the feet of many masters.

“Having acquired all which it was possible for him to learn of the Greek philosophers, he presumably became an initiate in the Eleusinian mysteries. He then went to Egypt, and after many rebuffs and refusals, finally succeeded in securing initiation in the Mysteries of Isis at the hands of the priests of Thebes,” according to Higgins (Hall 1977:LXVII). “Then this intrepid ‘joiner’ found his way into Phoenicia and Syria where the Mysteries of Adonis were conferred upon him, and crossing to the valley of the Euphrates he tarried long enough to become versed in the secret lore of the Chaldeans who still dwelt in the vicinity of Babylon. Finally, he made his greatest and most historic venture through Media and Persia into Hindustan where he remained several years as a pupil and initiate of the learned Brahmins of Elephanta and Ellora.”

Pythagoras’ teachings are of the most transcendental importance to all spiritual pilgrims, inasmuch as they are the necessary fruit of his contact with the leading philosophers of the whole civilized world of his own day, and must represent that in which all were agreed, shorn of all weeds of controversy, as Apollonius would again do during the time of Jesus. The determined stand made by Pythagoras, in defence of pure monotheism, is sufficient evidence that the tradition believed in the unity of God, and it was the supreme secret of all the ancient initiates. The philosophical school of Pythagoras was, in a measure, also a series of initiations, for he caused his pupils to pass through a series of degrees and never permitted them personal contact with himself until they had reached the higher grades. According to his biographers, says Higgins (Hall 1977:LXIX), “his degrees were three in number. The first, that of ‘Mathematicus,’ assuring his pupils proficiency in mathematics and geometry, which was then, as it would be now, if Masonry were properly inculcated, the basis upon which all other knowledge was erected. Secondly, the degree of ‘Theoreticus,’ which dealt with superficial applications of the exact sciences, and, lastly, the degree of ‘Electus,’ which entitled the candidate to pass forward into the light of the fullest illumination which he was capable of absorbing. The pupils of the Pythagorean School were divided

into 'exoterici,' or pupils in the outer grades, and 'esoterici,' after they had passed the third degree of initiation and were entitled to the secret wisdom. Silence, secrecy and unconditional obedience were cardinal principles of this great order."

"The study of geometry, music and astronomy was considered essential to a rational understanding of God, man, or Nature, and no one could accompany Pythagoras as a disciple who was not thoroughly familiar with these sciences. He taught moderation in all things rather than excess in anything, for he believed that an excess of virtue was in itself a vice. One of his favourite statements was: "We must avoid with our utmost endeavour, and amputate with fire and sword, and by all other means, from the body, sickness; from the soul, ignorance; from the belly, luxury; from a city, sedition; from a family, discord; and from all things, excess." Pythagoras also believed that there was no crime equal to that of anarchy.

"All men know what they want, but few know what they need. Pythagoras warned his disciples that when they prayed they should not pray for themselves; that when they asked things of the gods they should not ask things for themselves, because no man knows what is good for him and it is for this reason undesirable to ask for things which, if obtained, would only prove to be injurious. The God of Pythagoras was the Monad, or the One Everything. He described God as the Supreme Mind distributed throughout all parts of the universe, the Cause of all things, the Intelligence of all things, and the Power within all things. This is basically a panentheistic view; God being part of everything but much, much more than that.

"Pythagoras taught that friendship was the truest and nearest perfect of all relationships. He declared that in Nature there was a friendship of all for all; of gods for men; of doctrines one for another; of the soul for the body; of the rational part for the irrational part; of philosophy for its theory; of men for one another; of countrymen for one another; that friendship also existed between strangers, between a man and his wife, his children, and his servants. All bonds without friendship were shackles, and there was no virtue in their main-

tenance. The ultimate source that wisdom could cognize was the Monad, the mysterious permanent atom of the Pythagoreans. Pythagoras taught that both man and the universe were made in the image of God; that both being made in the same image, the understanding of one predicated the knowledge of the other. He further taught that there was a constant interplay between the Grand Man (the universe) and man (the little universe). Pythagoras believed that all the sidereal bodies were alive and that the forms of the planets and stars were souls, minds, and spirits in the same manner that the visible human form is but the encasing vehicle for an invisible spiritual organism, which in reality, is the conscious individual. Pythagoras regarded the planets as magnificent deities, worthy of the adoration and respect of man. All these deities, however, he considered subservient to the One First Cause within whom they all existed temporally, as mortality exists in the midst of immortality.

“The Pythagoreans emphasize the power of choice and it was used in the Mysteries as emblematic of the forking of the Ways”, says Hall (1977: LXVIII). The way to the right was called Divine Wisdom and the one to the left Earthly Wisdom. The neophyte must then choose whether he would take the left-hand path and, following the dictates of his lower nature, enter upon a life of folly and thoughtlessness which would inevitably result in his undoing, or whether he will take the right-hand road and through integrity, industry and sincerity ultimately regain union with the immortals in the superior spheres. The “Two Ways” of the *Didache* was very much in the same spirit, where the convert also was instructed in the results of this vital choice.

“Pythagoras believed that ultimately man would reach a state when he would cast off his gross nature and function in a body of spirit. From this he would ascend into the realm of the immortals, where by divine birthright he belonged. The most famous of the Pythagorean fragments are the Golden Verses, ascribed to Pythagoras himself, but concerning whose authorship there is an element of doubt. The Golden Verses contain a brief summary of the entire system of philosophy forming the basis of the educational doctrines of Crotona or, as it is more commonly known, the Italic School. These verses open by counselling the reader to love God, venerate the great heroes, and

respect the demons and elemental inhabitants. They then urge man to think carefully and industriously concerning his daily life, and to prefer the treasures of the mind and soul to accumulations of earthly goods. The verses also promise man that if he would rise above his lower material nature and cultivate self-control, he would ultimately be acceptable in the sight of the gods, be reunited with them, and partake of their immortality.” (Hall 1977: LXVIII)

In the *Anacalypsis* Godfrey Higgins writes: “The first striking circumstance in which the history of Pythagoras agrees with the history of Jesus is, that they were natives of nearly the same country; the former being born at Sidon, the latter at Bethlehem, both in Syria. The father of Pythagoras, as well as the father of Jesus, was prophetically informed that his wife should bring forth a son, who should be a benefactor to mankind. They were both born when their mothers were far from home on journeys, Joseph and his wife having gone up to Bethlehem to be counted, and the father of Pythagoras having travelled from Samos, his residence, to Sidon, about his mercantile concerns. Pythais [Pythasis], the mother of Pythagoras, had a connect with an Apolloniackal spectre, or ghost, of the God Apollo, or God Sol, (of course this must have been a holy ghost, and here we have the Holy Ghost) which afterwards appeared to her husband, and told him that he must not have marital relations with his wife during her pregnancy—a story evidently the same as that relating to Joseph and Mary. From these peculiar circumstances, Pythagoras was known by the same title as Jesus, namely, the Son of God; and was supposed by the multitude to be under the influence of Divine inspiration.” (Hall 1977: LXV)

Here we have a very representative practical example of a philosophic school operated partly in the tradition of a mystery religion. The combinations and the degree in which the philosophic, theological, ritualistic/experiential, school/ teaching and social elements as well as specific content are combined with secrecy, indicate to us the variety of possible institutional types which groups used to organise themselves. Adding to the variety is the fact that most groups were organised in multilayered institutions, where certain layers differ

in their mix of the mentioned elements from the next layer or stage of membership. An important example of this mix was the popular and universal Mysteries.

4.4 The Mystery Religions

To understand the Mysteries, Gnostics and even some metaphysical philosophies, a look at an early “revelationary” myth from ancient Egypt will give us an eerie feeling of relationship with all the mythic stories, including our own.

4.4.1 Hermes Trismegistus

In his *Biographia Antiqua*, Francis Barrett says of Hermes, “If God ever appeared in man, he appeared in him, as is evident both from his books and his *Pymander*; in which works he has communicated the sum of the Abyss, and the divine knowledge to all posterity; by which he has demonstrated himself to have been not only an inspired divine, but also a deep philosopher, obtaining his wisdom from God and heavenly things, and not from man.” His transcendent learning caused Hermes to be identified with many of the early sages and prophets. (Hall 1977:XXXVII)

The Divine Pymander, called Poimandres, or the Vision, is believed to describe the method by which the divine wisdom was first revealed to Hermes. It was after Hermes had received this revelation that he began his ministry, teaching to all who would listen to the secrets of the invisible universe as they had been unfolded to him. “The Vision” is the most famous of all the Hermetic fragments, according to Hall, and contains an exposition of Hermetic cosmogony and the secret sciences of the Egyptians regarding the culture and enfoldment of the human soul. “For the sake of clarity, the narrative form has been chosen in preference to the original dialogic style”, says Hall (1977:XXXVII), “and obsolete words have given place to those in current use.” I am not able to judge the correctness of Hall’s interpretations but the result is very interesting and stimulating from a historical point of view. For

reasons of space, only certain interesting extracts will be quoted, which will be discussed later.

“Hermes, while wandering in a rocky and desolate place, gave himself over to meditation and prayer. Following the secret instructions of the Temple he gradually freed his higher consciousness from the bondage of his bodily senses; and, thus released, his divine nature revealed to him the mysteries of the transcendental spheres. He beheld a figure, terrible and awe-inspiring. It was the Great Dragon, with wings stretching across the sky and light streaming in all directions from its body. (The Mysteries taught that the Universal Life was personified as a dragon.). The Great Dragon called Hermes by name, and asked him why he thus meditated upon the World Mystery. Terrified by the spectacle, Hermes prostrated himself before the Dragon, beseeching it to reveal its identity. The great creature answered that it was Poimandres, the Mind of the Universe, the Creative Intelligence, and the Absolute Emperor of all. Hermes then besought Poimandres to disclose the nature of the universe and the constitution of the gods. The Dragon acquiesced, bidding Trismegistus to hold its image in his mind.

- “I Thy God am the Light and the Mind which was, before substance was divided from spirit and darkness from Light. And the Word which appeared as a pillar of flame out of the darkness is the Son of God, born of the mystery of the Mind. The name of that Word is Reason. Reason is the offspring of Thought and Reason shall divide the Light from the darkness and establish Truth in the midst of the waters. Understand, O Hermes, and meditate deeply upon the mystery. That which in you sees and hears is not of the earth, but is the Word of God incarnate. So it is said that Divine Light dwells in the midst of mortal darkness, and ignorance cannot divide them. The union of the Word and the Mind produces that mystery which is called Life.
- “As the darkness without you is divided against itself, so the darkness within you is likewise divided. The Light and the fire which rises are the divine man, ascending in the path of the Word, and that which fails to ascend is the mortal man, which may not partake of immortality.

Learn deeply of the Mind and its mystery, for therein lies the secret of immortality.” (Hall 1977:xxxix)

- “In describing creation, ‘The Word moving like a breath through space called forth the Fire by the friction of its motion. Therefore, the Fire is called the Son of Striving. The Workman passed as a whirlwind through the universe, causing the substances to vibrate and glow with its friction. The Son of Striving thus formed Seven Governors, the Spirits of the Planets, whose orbits bounded the world; and the Seven Governors controlled the world by the mysterious power called Destiny given them by the Fiery Workman. When the Second Mind (The Workman) had organized Chaos, the Word of God rose straightway out of its prison of substance, leaving the elements without Reason, and joined itself to the nature of the Fiery Workman. Then the Second Mind, together with the risen Word, established itself in the midst of the universe and whirled the wheels of the Celestial Powers. This shall continue from an infinite beginning to an infinite end, for the beginning and the ending are in the same place and state’.
- “Then the Father—the Supreme Mind—being Light and Life, fashioned a glorious Universal Man in Its own image, not an earthly man but a heavenly Man dwelling in the Light of God. The Supreme Mind loved the Man It had fashioned and delivered to Him the control of the creations and workmanships. The Man, desiring to labour, took up His abode in the sphere of generation and observed the works of His brother—the Second Mind—which sat upon the Ring of the Fire. And having beheld the achievements of the Fiery Workman, He willed also to make things, and His Father gave permission. The Seven Governors, of whose powers He partook, rejoiced and each gave the Man a share of its own nature.
- “The Man longed to pierce the circumference of the circles and understand the mystery of Him who sat upon the Eternal Fire. Having already all power, He stooped down and peeped through the seven Harmonies and, breaking through the strength of the circles, made Himself manifest to Nature stretched out below. The Man, looking into the depths, smiled, for He beheld a shadow upon the earth and a

likeness mirrored in the waters, which shadow and likeness were a reflection of Himself. The Man fell in love with His own shadow and desired to descend into it. Coincident with the desire the Intelligent Thing united itself with the unreasoning image or shape. "Nature, beholding the descent, wrapped herself about the Man whom she loved, and the two were mingled. For this reason, earthly man is composite. Within him is the Sky Man, immortal and beautiful; without is Nature, mortal and destructible. Thus, suffering is the result of the Immortal Man's falling in love with His shadow and giving up Reality to dwell in the darkness of illusion; for, being immortal, man has the power of the Seven Governors—also the Life, the Light, and the Word—but, being mortal, he is controlled by the Rings of the Governors—Fate or Destiny.

- "Of the Immortal Man it should be said that He is hermaphrodite, or male and female, and eternally watchful. He neither slumbers nor sleeps, and is governed by a Father also both male and female, and ever watchful. Such is the mystery kept hidden to this day, for Nature, being mingled in marriage with the Sky Man, brought forth a wonder most wonderful—seven men, all bisexual, male and female, and upright of stature, each one exemplifying the natures of the Seven Governors. These, O Hermes, are the seven races, species, and wheels.
- "Then God spoke to the Holy Word within the soul of all things, saying: 'Increase in increasing and multiply in multitudes, all you, my creatures and workmanships. Let him that is endued with Mind know himself to be immortal and that the cause of death is the love of the body; and let him learn all things that are, for he who has recognized himself enters into the state of Good.'
- "Then Hermes desired to know why men should be deprived of immortality for the sin of ignorance alone. The Great Dragon answered: 'To the ignorant the body is supreme and they are incapable of realising the immortality that is within them. Knowing only the body which is subject to death, they believe in death because they worship that substance which is the cause and reality of death.'

- “Then Hermes asked how the righteous and wise pass to God, to which Poimandres replied: ‘That which the Word of God said, say I: ‘Because the Father of all things consists of Life and Light, whereof man is made.’ If, therefore, a man shall learn and understand the nature of Life and Light, then he shall pass into the eternity of Life and Light.’
- “Hermes next inquired about the road by which the wise attained to Life eternal, and Poimandres continued: “Let the man endued with a Mind mark, consider, and learn of himself, and with the power of his Mind divide himself from his not-self and become a servant of Reality.”
- “Hermes asked if all men did not have Minds, and the Great Dragon replied: ‘Take heed what you say, for I am the Mind—the Eternal Teacher. I am the Father of the Word—the Redeemer of all men—and in the nature of the wise the Word takes flesh. By means of the Word, the world is saved. I, Thought (Thoth)—the Father of the Word, the Mind—come only unto men that are holy and good, pure and merciful, and that live piously and religiously, and my presence is an inspiration and a help to them, for when I come they immediately know all things and adore the Universal Father. Before such wise and philosophic ones die, they learn to renounce their senses, knowing that these are the enemies of their immortal souls’.
- “I am unwelcome to the wicked, I leave them to the avenging demon that they are making in their own souls, for evil each day increases itself and torments man more sharply, and each evil deed adds to the evil deeds that are gone before until finally evil destroys itself. The punishment of desire is the agony of unfulfillment.
- “At death the material body of man is returned to the elements from which it came, and the invisible divine man ascends to the source from whence he came, namely the Eighth Sphere. The evil passes to the dwelling place of the demon, and the senses, feelings, desires, and body passions return to their source, namely the Seven Governors, whose natures in the lower man destroy but in the invisible spiritual man give life.

- “The path to immortality is hard, and only a few find it. The rest await the Great Day when the wheels of the universe shall be stopped and the immortal sparks shall escape from the sheaths of substance. Woe unto those who wait, for they must return again, unconscious and unknowing, to the seed-ground of stars, and await a new beginning. Those who are saved by the light of the mystery which I have revealed unto you, O Hermes, and which I now bid you to establish among men, shall return again to the Father who dwelleth in the White Light, and shall deliver themselves up to the Light and shall be absorbed into the Light, and in the Light they shall become Powers in God. This is the Way of Good and is revealed only to them that have wisdom.
- “Blessed art thou, O Son of Light, to whom of all men, I, Poimandres, the Light of the World, have revealed myself. I order you to go forth, to become as a guide to those who wander in darkness that all men within who dwells the spirit of My Mind (The Universal Mind) may be saved by My Mind in you, which shall call forth My Mind in them. Establish My Mysteries and they shall not fail from the earth, for I am the Mind of the Mysteries and until Mind fails (which is never) my Mysteries cannot fail. With these parting words, Poimandres, radiant with celestial light, vanished, mingling with the powers of the heavens. Raising his eyes unto the heavens, Hermes blessed the Father of All Things and consecrated his life to the service of the Great Light
- “Thus preached Hermes, ‘O people of the earth, men born and made of the elements, but with the spirit of the Divine Man within you, rise from your sleep of ignorance! Be sober and thoughtful. Realise that your home is not in the earth but in the Light. Why have you delivered yourselves over unto death, having power to partake of immortality? Repent, and change your minds. Depart from the dark light and forsake corruption forever. Prepare yourselves to climb through the Seven Rings and to blend your souls with the eternal Light.’
- “The ‘Vision of Hermes’, like nearly all of the Hermetic writings, is an allegorical exposition of great philosophic and mystic truths, and its hidden meaning may be comprehended only by those who have been ‘raised’ into the presence of the True Mind. The mysteries of

Hermeticism, the great spiritual truths hidden from the world by the ignorance of the world and the keys of the secret doctrines of the ancient philosophers, are all symbolized by the Virgin Isis. Veiled from head to foot she reveals her wisdom only to the tried and initiated few who have earned the right to enter her sacred presence, tear from the veiled figure of nature its shroud of obscurity, and face to face with Divine Reality.” (Hall, 1977:XXXIX, XL)

It should be clear that this “revelation”, which is regarded by many scholars as one of the foundational ones from Egypt and the ancient world, did in fact influence virtually all other myths and esoteric philosophies, including those of the philosophers, Christian Gospels and the Gnostics. It is, of course, possible that the Eastern mystic philosophies developed parallel with their Egyptian counterparts and came to the same basic conclusions from the inherent universal spirituality of humankind as such.

One additional fact that remains to be highlighted at this stage is that the secrecy of the mysteries over the ages was virtually total. The myths or outer teachings were sometimes known; the esoteric or inner teachings, for reasons of safety and probable misuse, were virtually never put into a written form and were always secretly and personally taught from symbol and code. It is not difficult to see that by nature of the quest of aspiring to become a fully developed and mature agent of God these esoteric philosophies demand thorough understanding, strict disciplines and diligent practices; it is bound to be suitable only for a special group of people and could become somewhat elitist under certain leadership. The “outsiders” will not take kindly to any secret organizations, while a secret system is very vulnerable to corruption in the wrong hands. Corruption would manifest in ‘pseudo-mysteries’, targeting the superstitious and gullible and corrupting the teachings and practices. These fraudulent mysteries were surely also part of the religious landscape. The major problem is therefore not only to rediscover the ancient philosophies from the different windows of information now available to us, but also to distinguish between the corrupted and the authentic ones. To reconstruct them we need all the help we can get and we have to investigate all possible leads.

For our present purposes it is not possible to dwell too much on the symbolism, also because of the vastness of its scope. Suffice it to say that nature and especially the heavenly population were the favourites for their symbolism and for very good reasons; therefore we will only make a few brief comments about its importance.

4.4.1.1 Symbolism

When civilization settled in communities and towns they were very dependent on nature for their agricultural practices. It is not difficult to see that the Sun was at the centre of all life, due to its heat and light properties and it became also an important reference point for viewing and relating the dynamic celestial activities. The sun is the giver of light, heat and therefore life; it was regarded as an important god or rather symbol of God, since the beginning of civilization. "Older than all written history and records has been the fear and wonderment of the children of mankind over the failure of the sun's strength in autumn - The decay of their god, and the anxiety that by any chance he should not revive or reappear! Their Great source of light and warmth was daily failing, daily sinking lower in the sky for about three weeks at the end of the year (Northern hemisphere) when the days are at their shortest and there is very little change; what will happen to creation? Evidently, the god had fallen upon bad times. Typhon, the prince of darkness, had betrayed him, Delilah the queen of the night, had shorn off his hair, and the dreadful Boar had wounded him; Hercules was struggling with death itself: he had fallen under the influence of those malign constellations - the serpent and the scorpion. Would the god grow weaker and weaker, and finally succumb, or would he be the victorious conqueror after all? We can imagine the anxiety with which those early men and women watched for the first indication of a lengthening day; and the universal joy when the Priest (the representative of primitive science and spirituality), having made some simple observations, announced from the Temple steps that the day was lengthening - that the sun was really born again (around the 25th of December) to a new and glorious career. Glory to the god and his priests! But in this long night of his greatest winter weakness when the entire world was hoping and praying for the renewal of his strength it is

evident that the new birth would come - if it came at all - at midnight. This, then, was the sacred hour when in the underworld (the stable or cave or whatever it might be called) the child was born who was destined to be the saviour of men. At that moment Sirius stood at the meridian, and that star - there is little doubt - is the star in the East mentioned in the Gospels. Immediately after midnight then, on the 25th of December, the beloved son (or sun-god) is born. If we go back in thought to a period some three thousand years ago (the approximate time when this myth originated) when at that moment of the heavenly birth, Sirius coming from the East, did actually stand on the meridian, we shall come in touch with another curious astronomical coincidence. At that stage the Virgin was seen just rising in the eastern sky - the horizon lines passing through her centre." (Carpenter 1920:30, 32)

"From the point of view of the position of the sun and the ensuing seasons, one can discern three fairly independent streams of religious or quasi-religious enthusiasm. This can also be seen in the different gods of nature and their cults and the Mysteries that are born of them. The first comes from that which is connected with the phenomena of the heavens, the movements of the sun, planets and stars, and the awe and wonderment they excited; second, that which is connected with the seasons and the very important matter of the growth of vegetation and food on earth; and, the third, that which connected with the mysteries of sex and reproduction. It is obvious that these three streams would mingle and interfuse with each other a great deal; but as far as they were separable, the first would tend to create solar heroes and sun-myths; the second vegetation-gods and heroes and sun-myths and personifications of nature and the earth life; while the third would throw its glamour over the other two and contribute to the projection of deities or daemons worshipped with all sorts of sexual and phallic rites. All three systems would of course have their special rites and times and ceremonies, but the rites and ceremonies of one system would rarely be found pure and unmixed with those belonging to the other two." (Carpenter 1920: 20)

4.4.2 The Mysteries of Mithras

The teachings of the ancient Roman mystery religion of Mithraism – one of the most important competitors of early Christianity – were guarded with the utmost secrecy, revealed only to select initiates. In addition to the inherent interest of such an enigmatic phenomenon, the study of Mithraism is also of great importance for our understanding of what Arnold Toynbee (Ulansey 1991:4) has called the “Crucible of Christianity,” the cultural matrixes in which the Christian religion came to birth out of the civilization of the ancient Mediterranean. Indeed, the French historian Ernest Renan once declared that “if Christianity had been stopped at its birth by some mortal illness, the world would have become Mithraic.”

Due to restrictions of space we will have to be satisfied with a few observations that relate to the general structure of the mysteries. For although the iconography of the cult varied a great deal from temple to temple, there is one element of the cult’s iconography which was present in essentially the same form in every mithraeum and which, moreover, was clearly of the utmost importance to the cult’s ideology: namely, the so-called touroctony, or bull-slaying scene, in which is depicted the act of killing a bull. If we can decipher it, this holds the key to the inner mysteries of Mithraism.

Central to the touroctony is Mithras killing the bull but also included are a number of other figures such as a snake (Hydra) a dog (Canis Minor) a raven (Corvus) a scorpion (Scorpius) and sometimes a lion (Leo) and a cup (Crater). Ulansey (1991:19) therefore, argues the point that the cult’s iconography was actually an astronomical code. Origen’s planetary “ladder with seven gates” appears to be connected with the seven levels of Mithraic initiation; Crow, Nymphus, Soldier, Lion, Persian, Heliodromus or “Sun-Runner”, and the Father mentioned in one of the letters of the church father Jerome, as symbols for these initiatory stages and are found associated with symbols of the seven planets in mosaics found in the mithraeum at Ostia.

If we understand salvation to be a divinely bestowed promise of safety in the deepest sense, both during life and after death, then the god whose presence we have discerned beneath the veils of Mithraic iconography was well suited to perform the role of saviour. Ulansey confirmed through his studies that the heavenly symbolism was also based in proper science; that the Stoics who virtually ruled Tarsus were not only competent in philosophy but were exceptional and scientific astronomers, centuries before Paul and Jesus. He gives us an account of how they saw God, the cosmos and the spiritual world, as well as good account of the “outer mysteries” or mythical construction, in a rational and well argued way. The disappointment is that he does not even attempt to access the “inner mysteries” as applicable to the seven or, in some countries three, (perhaps the military version or an older Persian version that Ulansey was not aware of, see Wilder below), stages of initiation of this brotherhood.

Alexander Wilder (Hall 1977: XXIV), in his “Philosophy and Ethics of the Zoroastrians”, thinks that the Mithraic cult is a simplification of the more elaborate teachings of Zarathushtra (Zoroaster), the Persian fire magician. “Initiation into the rites of Mithras, like initiation into many other ancient schools of philosophy, apparently consisted of three important degrees. Preparation for these degrees consisted of self-purification, the building up of the intellectual powers and control of the animal nature. In the first degree the candidate was given a crown upon the point of a sword and instructed in the mysteries of Mithras’ hidden power. Probably he was taught that the golden crown represented his own spiritual nature, which must be objectified and unfolded before he could truly glorify Mithras; for Mithras was his own soul, standing as mediator between Ormuzd, his spirit, and Ahriman, his animal nature. In the second degree, he was given the armour of intelligence and purity and sent into the darkness of subterranean pits to fight the beasts of lust, passion, and degeneracy. In the third degree he was given a cape, upon which were drawn or woven the signs of the zodiac and other astronomical symbols. After his initiations were over he was hailed as one who had risen from the dead, was instructed in the secret teachings of the Persian mystics, and became a full-fledged member of the order. Candidates who successfully passed the

Mithraic initiations were called Lions and were marked upon their foreheads with the Egyptian cross. Mithras himself is often pictured with the head of a lion and two pairs of wings. Throughout the entire ritual were repeated references to the Sun God, his sacrifice for man, his death that men might have eternal life, and lastly, his resurrection and the saving of all humanity by his intercession before the throne of Ormuzd."

Manly P. Hall (1969) in another booklet, "Melhizedek and the Mystery of Fire", gives us further enlightenment. He says that the elaborate rituals of the ancient mysteries and the simpler ceremonials of modern religious institutions had a common purpose. These myths and rituals serve as the outer mysteries and were designed to preserve, by means of symbolic dramas and processions, certain secret and holy processes, through the understanding of which man may more intelligently work out his salvation, the "inner mystery". "The possession of the occult keys to human salvation through the knowledge of self, in relation to Self and the cosmos, is the goal for which the wise of all ages have laboured. It was the hope of possessing these secret formulae that strengthened the candidates who struggled valiantly through the dangers and disappointments of the ancient initiations, sometimes actually giving their lives in the quest for truth. The initiation process intended severe mental and even physical tests, to serve as a process for eliminating those unfit to be entrusted with the secrets at the time of their 'rising'. The initiates in the order of Pythagoras had to remain silent for five years, before they could enter into the school or program and to learn thoughtful communication. For that reason the 'word' remained lost to all save those who still complied with the requirements of the ancient mysteries, for the law was that to such that live the life, the doctrine is revealed. Still, the great spiritual truths are not as deeply concealed as might be supposed. Most of them are exposed to view at all times, but are not recognized because of their concealment in symbol and allegory", says Hall (1996: 13).

Furthermore, many philosophers tried to clothe the arcane mysteries in a more logical and less sinister form, like Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato and their followers. Many philosophers simply took the existence of God and man's

inherent moral superiority to animals as a point of departure and then reason from there to the same logical conclusion, for example, Confucius, Aristotle and Kant. Some philosophers, like Buddha and mystics of all sorts, take the “inner” path of depth psychology and meditation combined with contemplation to arrive at the same conclusions.

4.4.3 The Universal Strategy of the Mysteries

“In all ages of which we have any literary records, we find a tradition of a recondite knowledge which could not be disclosed to any save to those who had undergone the severest test as to their worthiness to receive it. This knowledge was very generally known under the term of the Mysteries.” (William Kingsland quoted by Drake in Hall 1977: I). “Associations of men and women, bound together by oaths and obligations into esoteric fraternities, have descended from the earliest times and bear witness to a natural inclination to perpetuate doctrines which lead to the good of mankind.” Furthermore, Henry L. Drake, of the Philosophical Research Society says, “that with the growth of social consciousness these secret societies became custodians of the highest cultural concepts. Their initiation rites were symbolic pageantries suitable to inspire veneration for the Divine Mysteries, and admiration for the powers of nature and of God. Most of the mythologies of classical nations were originally rituals of secret societies and it is a mistake to assume that earlier cultures accepted as literal the elaborate theology and legendry found in their traditions. Historically the secret societies were closely identified with state religions.

“In the program of the Mysteries”, Drake says, “each individual must grow into the comprehension of truth. Before he could be entrusted with the divine powers of the Mind and will, he must accept knowledge as a responsibility to his creator and this world, rather than as an opportunity for the advancement of personal ambitions. The masters of the mysteries taught secret practices and disciplines by which the properly qualified disciples could develop the potent abilities latent within his soul, and so come into conscious communication with spiritual realities. After initiation, they are regarded as

‘Twice-Born’, for they had come to the second birth from the womb of the mysteries. These adept-philosophers were the truly evolved human beings. Most of the arts and sciences that enrich the modern world were discovered, developed, and in many instances perfected by these initiated philosophers and priests.

“Scholarship was recognized as the pursuit most suitable to the abilities of man. But, scholarship was always the means, never the end. The end of the sacred sciences was the abstraction of the human soul from bondage to the senses and its preparation to receive within itself the light of vast truths. Some men are naturally suited to higher learning for they possess integrity of motive, the patience of effort, and the vision of ends – these laboured toward the soul’s improvement, and championed enlightened progress above other considerations.

“The secrets of the Mysteries are obviously metaphysical, philosophical and esoteric and relate to the process taking place within the fields of the human psyche during the practice of the spiritual disciplines. Discipleship ends in the attainment of an inner capacity suitable for the realisation of the esoteric tradition. The disciplines, by expanding consciousness, give the initiate practical mastery over that which is learned and constant awareness as to the proper use of higher learning. Those who do not understand the spiritual sciences, and may I add those who are not part of the society, question their use of unusual symbols, myths, and figures employed to conceal the essential teaching.” (Drake 1977: LII)

About the mysteries in general, Carpenter (1920:21) said that, “at the time of the life or recorded appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, and for some centuries before, the Mediterranean and neighbouring world had been the scene of a vast number of pagan creeds and rituals. There were Temples without end dedicated to gods such as Apollo or Dionysus among the Greeks, Hercules among the Romans, Mithra among the Persians, Adonis and Attis in Syria and Phrygia, Osiris and Isis and Horus in Egypt, Baal and Astarte among the Babylonians and Carthaginians, and so forth. Societies, large or small, united

believers and the devout in the service or ceremonials connected with their respective deities, and in the creeds which they confessed concerning these deities. And an extraordinarily interesting fact, for us, is that notwithstanding great geographical distances and racial differences between the adherents of these various cults, as well as differences in the details of their services, the general outlines of their creeds and ceremonials were - if not identical - so markedly similar." Carpenter said that he could not, of course, go at length into these different cults, but he may say roughly that of all or nearly all the deities above-mentioned it was said and believed that:

1. They were born on or very near our Christmas Day.
2. They were born of a Virgin-Mother.
3. In a Cave or Underground Chamber.
4. They led a life of toil for Mankind.
5. And were called by the names of Light-bringer, Healer, Mediator, Saviour, Deliverer.
6. They were, however, vanquished by the Powers of Darkness.
7. And descended into Hell or the Underworld.
8. They rose again from the dead, and became the pioneers of mankind to the Heavenly world.
9. They founded Communions of Saints and Churches into which disciples were received by Baptism.
10. And they were commemorated by Eucharistic meals.

Carpenter (1920:22) gives us a few brief examples. "Mithra was born in a cave, and on 25th December. He was born of a virgin. He travelled far and wide as a teacher and illuminator of men. He slew the Bull (symbol of the gross Earth which the sunlight fructifies). His great festivals were the winter solstice and the spring equinox (Christmas and Easter). He had twelve companions or disciples (the twelve months, or the Zodiac). He was buried in a tomb, from which he rose again, and his resurrection was celebrated yearly with great rejoicings. He was called Saviour and Mediator, and sometimes figured as a Lamb; and sacramental feasts in remembrance of him were held

by his followers. This legend is apparently partly astronomical and partly vegetative; and the same may be said of Osiris, Adonis, Attis and Hercules."

We now have to add real people such as Krishna, Zoroaster, Pythagoras and Jesus, sharing in important aspects of the universal hero, which constitute the outer mysteries of all these religious-philosophical systems. The esoteric explanations and application of these typical "histories" and activities, acknowledge each individual's private quest to spiritual discovery and development that constitute the inner mysteries, which require understanding, commitment and perseverance.

Man's status in the natural world is determined, says Aristotle, by the quality of his thinking. Because thinking is only effective where facts are available, Confucius tells us that learning is the most important intellectual task in this life. Therefore, learning and reasoning, coupled to love of all others best define the excellence and uniqueness of humanity. But, when it comes to the mysteries of life and death, learning is of dubious value because of the quality and nature of the knowledge required; it is non-scientific or imaginative, intuitive and abstract. Faith and personal experience must now augment knowledge of related things to help reason and to empower our intuitive faculties. To assimilate this metaphysical knowledge and reconcile it to our concepts of reality we need a multilayered mechanism. This powerful tool is supplied by mythic understanding, with at least a two layered message. Firstly, the outer form or story, that relates sequence and events to us in a mythical, magical and emotional way to sidestep our critical, rational censoring mechanism in the brain, and also to help us to remember a long, complicated story. Subsequently, intelligible, allegorical interpretation of the abstract and complex meanings must follow, to realise the inner teachings and meaning of the myth, which should now aid our understanding of life's mysteries and serve as practical directives. However, as we know, understanding is coupled to intelligence, knowledge and experience. Therefore, the esoteric message should preferably allow for further grading or layered interpretation, to benefit as many as possible, provided they are motivated enough to take up this difficult task. In real life we have to start off with the "hero" who has the will,

guts and stamina to complete his mission to “meaning” so that he could help others. The hero must therefore, have the will, guts and determination to “kill”, “crucify” or “die to”, the opposing internal hindrances, instincts, “lower soul” or “flesh”, that want to keep him in the so-called pleasure and power mode, so that he may be “resurrected” or be “born twice”, thereby accepting the challenge of the “higher soul” of the spiritual sphere, before he could make progress in his eternal quest. If one accepts this explanation of the workings of myth and meaning for the universal everybody and “spiritual heroes” of all times and places, then the rest is but culture specific detail.

To the normal inhabitant of the first-century Graeco-Roman world the new group called Christians looked most like a new mystery cult. It did bear some resemblance to a school of philosophy and Christian writers often tried to present it as such, says Riley (1997:147), but it was immediately classified by nearly all as a mystery religion.

4.5 Apollonius of Tyana

In the early years of the Christian era, the great reformer of religions and mystic Apollonius of Tyana moved through the known world of the time, teaching wisdom and leaving strange legends of his insight, kindness and miracles wherever he passed. Many devotees considered him divine. G.R.S. Mead (1966:v), who wrote a fine study of his life and work, says: “With the exception of the Christ no more interesting personage appears upon the stage of Western history in those early years.”

“There may have been only a few years between the birth of Jesus and of Apollonius, and the curious parallels between their lives have given rise to much religious controversy, some believing that incidents in the life of Apollonius were myths borrowed from Christianity, others suggesting that the Christians had borrowed earlier stories concerning Apollonius for their own Gospels. For centuries religious argument raged around the figure of Apollonius. Was he divine or charlatan, saint or magician? Was he better or worse than Jesus of Nazareth? Apollonius was regarded as a serious religious

rival to Jesus Christ, and even as late as the seventeenth century there were free thinkers like Voltaire who extolled his teachings above those of Christianity. This is even more remarkable when one remembers that Apollonius, like Jesus, left no gospel; certainly not one that has been preserved. There is one early biography and there are stray references and fragments. We know that Apollonius was responsible for various treatises, since they are mentioned by other writers, but these books have all vanished.

“In a period when the stage was being set for the greatest clash of rival religious doctrines the world has known, Apollonius travelled throughout that world, teaching a simple approach to religion which made him welcome at many different shrines. He had no quarrels with rival religions and does not mention the followers of Christ, although he must have encountered their teachings during his travels. He was concerned with the spirit rather than the form of religion”, says Shepard. (Mead 1966:xxii)

“At the age of fourteen his father took him to Tarsus, where a certain Saul was born – a tentmaker who became the Christian Apostle Paul. Apollonius studied under Euthydemus the Phoenician, a celebrated rhetorician, but the boy was ill at ease in the luxurious life of Tarsus. He soon moved to the nearby town of Aegae which was quieter, and here he studied in the temple devoted to Aesculapius, god of healing, where he soon excelled even his instructors. He had an extraordinary natural inclination to the teachings that had been brought to Greece from India. He became a Neo-Pythagorean, although he soon found the instruction too theoretical, and even at this age decided to live his philosophy, not discuss it. At the age of twenty he gave away his inheritance to his elder brother and other relatives. He took a vow of silence for five years and began his travels through the world, clad in a simple robe and eating only vegetarian food. He visited mystic communities south of Palestine and, somewhere between C.E. 41 and 54 he travelled to India, visiting Brahmans and Buddhists. He finally disappeared mysteriously from mortal view at an age somewhere between eighty and a hundred years.

“Throughout his travels he pleaded for simplicity and sincerity in religion. Although he had a reputation for performing miracles he did not pose as a superior being. He once said: ‘I ever remember my Masters, and journeyed through the world teaching what I have learned from them....’” (Mead 1966:33) “Many Christian theologians accepted his ‘miracles’, but they solemnly compared them with Christian miracles and tried to prove that theirs were the best ones! A polemic by Eusebius, a Christian bishop, ‘Against the life of Apollonius of Tyana’ written by Philostratus, occasioned by the parallel drawn by Hierocles between him and Christ, tells its own story. Hierocles, Proconsul of Bithynia under Diocletian, thought that the miracles attributed to Apollonius were better authenticated than those ascribed to Christ, but Eusebius maintained that if Apollonius did perform miracles he must have been a wizard, not a saint.”

Apollonius’ adeptness in the healing profession, physical and psychological, was to him an art and a science; either he or his enlightened followers did definitively not see it as miracles. Furthermore, the “Temple of Aesculapius” where he was trained, functioned also as a medical hospital for the region, according to Mead. If one takes into consideration that this sage was a contemporary of Paul, and came also from Tarsus, which was near to where Apollonius was trained in the healing arts, then one can perhaps see why Paul did not even try to make a fuss about the so-called miracles of Jesus. “There have been many opinions about his gifts. St. Jerome thought he was a magician, but that there were also praiseworthy things about his life. St. Augustine, discussing heathen religion, allowed that Apollonius was ‘purer than Jove’.” (Shepard quoted in Mead 1966: xi)

“What gives the story of Apollonius very special significance is rather that in an era when rival churches fought for establishment he taught the pure inner realisation that was known to the sages of India as far back as their scriptures record, and that has endured even to the present day; an esoteric wisdom that has seen the rise and fall of many religions over thousands of years. Most of his opponents did not understand his teachings or his mission, or perhaps they just did not want to understand the real issues. Doctrinaire theologians have

been more interested in establishing a church than understanding a teaching; sceptical professors have been too anxious to prove a dry academic theory than to be able to share a metaphysical insight", says Mead (1966:10). "The Church Fathers have tried to evaluate Apollonius by exterior evidence only, without any reliable measure for his inner life. True saints have never been interested in miracles, have never sought them, and have often been unaware of them."

"In the domain of religion", says Mead, "it is quite true that the state cults and national institutions throughout the Empire were almost without exception in a parious state, and it is to be noticed that Apollonius devoted much time and labour to reviving and purifying them. Indeed, their strength had long left the general state-institutions of religion, where all was now perfunctory; but far from there being no religious life in the land, in proportion as the official cults and ancestral institutions afforded no real satisfaction to their religious needs, the more earnestly did the people devote themselves to private cults and eagerly baptized themselves in all that flood of religious enthusiasm which flowed in with ever increasing volume from the East. Indubitably in all this fermentation there were many excesses, according to our present notions of religious decorum, and also grievous abuses; but at the same time many found due satisfaction for their religious emotions in it and if we except those cults which were distinctly vicious, we have to a large extent before us in popular circles the spectacle of what, in the final analysis, are phenomena similar to those enthusiasms which in our own day may be frequently witnessed among such sects as the Shakers or Ranters, and at the general revival meetings of the uninstructed." (Mead 1966:10)

"Why do men call you a god?" Apollonius was asked, and he replied: "Every man thought to be good is honoured with the title of god." (Shepard, quoted in Mead 1966:xxii) "Apollonius was welcomed in the temples of different faiths, and wherever he went he instructed people to purify their lives, to give up animal sacrifices, and to seek the essence of religion rather than the form. He spoke with authority and was accepted as a master. He knew religion from the inside; that all true religions stripped of the outer mysteries are essentially the

same in their inner messages. Through centuries of holy wars, bloodshed and martyrdom, history is littered with the debris of overthrown religions, and the images of discarded gods lie broken in empty temples. The knowledge that could liberate has often only enslaved minds and inflated egos. When a divine man becomes a symbol, a simple truth turns to dogma, and meaning is lost in the deification of form instead of essence. Yet many saints realised the same truths and practised what they preached." (Shepard 1966: xxii)

"We have only to remember the various lines of descent of the doctrines held by the innumerable schools classed together as Gnostic, as sketched in Mead's recent work, 'Fragments of a Faith Forgotten', and to turn to the beautiful treatises of the Hermetic schools, to persuade us that in the first century the striving after the religious and philosophic life was wide-spread and various." (Shepard 1966:14)

"It is not, however, to be thought that Apollonius set out to make a propaganda of Indian philosophy in the same way that the ordinary missionary sets forth to preach his conception of the Gospel. By no means; Apollonius seems to have endeavoured to help his hearers, whoever they might be, in the way best suited to each of them. He did not begin by telling them that what they believed was utterly false and soul-destroying and that their eternal welfare depended upon their instantly adopting his own special scheme of salvation; he simply endeavoured to purge and further explain what they already believed and practiced. He was the most famous philosopher of the Graeco-Roman world of the first century, and devoted the major part of his long life to the purification of the many cults of the Empire and to the instruction of the ministers and priests of its religions. To Apollonius the mere fashion of a man's faith was unessential; he was at home in all lands, among all cults. He had a helpful word for all, an intimate knowledge of the particular way of each of them, which enabled him to restore them to health. He conversed with the temple priests or the heads of the community, according to where he was staying, in a Greek or non-Greek temple with public rites, or in a community with a discipline peculiar to itself and apart from the public cult." (Mead, 1966:64)

“Lactantius, writing about 315 C.E., also attacked the treatise of Hierocles, who seems to have put forward some very pertinent criticisms; for the Church Father says that Apollonius enumerates so many of their Christian *inner* teachings (*intima*) that sometimes he would seem to have at one time undergone the same training (*disciplina*). But it is in vain, says Lactantius, that Hierocles endeavours to show that Apollonius performed similar or even greater deeds than Jesus, for Christians do not believe that Christ is God because he did wonderful things, but because all the things wrought in him were those which were announced by the prophets. And in taking this ground Lactantius saw far more clearly than Eusebius the weakness of the proof from ‘miracle’.” (Mead, 1966:35) An interesting point here is the frequent references to their so-called “inner” teachings and “training”, which correspond with the admissions of Clement and Origen, of which they effectively admitted close methodical similarities with the Mysteries and the Gnostics, as we shall see in the following section.

4.6 Gnosis, Gnostics and Gnosticism

“Knowledge” of God is either revealed or intuitive, but never objectively verifiable and therefore “gnosis” not “episteme”, as Aristotle would tell us. Keeping in mind what we have discussed previously, theology in its function of “faith seeking understanding” it is, basically, a gnostic exercise where we use logic, but from subjective information.

A good introduction to the discussion of this complex topic is to examine Barrett’s (1994:57) opinion of Paul, versus other groups he then labels Gnostic. Barrett reminds us that religions of salvation were not scarce in Paul’s environment and their presuppositions were not unfamiliar. “Some of Paul’s contemporaries thought of a world that had been wrong from the start, that it was wrong in itself and could only cease to be wrong by ceasing to be itself. Creation was an unfortunate error that had to be undone; salvation could be thought of as de-creation. The empirical universe could be thought of as an unhappy mixture of spirit (which was good and immortal) and matter (which was evil and subject to death). Salvation then consisted in the

resolution of this radical dualism. This mixture had to be sorted out and spirit freed from matter. This was the basic proposition which the various Gnostic myths expressed in an endless series of mythological fantasies — fantasies indeed, but not fantasies that can be regarded as objects of scorn, for they were the products of sensitive minds burdened by the world's evil which they took as seriously as it deserved to be taken." (Barrett 1994: 57)

It seems that Barret wants to categorize gnostics as including only those who rebelled against what they believed to be "faulty creational happenings", resulting in an unjust world where the good suffered with the bad. We have seen that various philosophical groups and various mystery religions, as well as Eastern religions, competed for reasonable answers to this basic perceived problem. We have not even discussed the Jewish answers, but you can be sure there were a couple of explanations on offer. In an Empire steeped in Greek culture and Roman law where only a few had citizenship and the Emperors needed law abiding citizens as well as religious uniformity for political stabilization, plenty of conquered gods and their priestly managers needed new strategies for survival. The Romans practically conquered their victims' gods also, while the Temple cults, including the Jewish one, were in a sorry state. This process of regrouping and re-engineering and re-thinking among these conquered groups, to make sense again of their particular god's plans and to give the necessary explanations of what went wrong, was inevitable and new "revelations" were kaleidoscopic, presenting many views from many different perspectives. Virtually every cultural, religious and charismatic group was busy reinventing their dogma and desperately looking for converts to share in their beliefs and in their new theology.

The universal strategy from time immemorial has been to create an "inspired" myth, which from its nature as a likely story that nobody can dispute, could be the basis of your theology. The initiates or believers are then gradually introduced into the secrets or mysteries that are represented in the "symbolic truths". As the saying goes, the sky is the limit, but sometimes not even the sky could contain the enthusiasm of certain creative minds. This process resulted in novel theologies of all sorts and combinations. The mix included

revisions, borrowings and inventions; the stock in trade was any religious concept, any philosophical construct, in any possible combination depending only on intelligibility because of Greek rationalistic influences.

The myth has to explain why “things” went wrong since creation and why life seems to be meaningless and haphazard, why the righteous suffer and the wicked flourish. The quantity and quality of answers were relative only to the sensitivity and creativity of charismatic leaders, who were themselves in the process of looking for answers. The main branches of speculation were firstly, that God’s creation was good; man fouled it up by his arrogance and his disobedience. The second solution was that God had the blueprints of the ideal creation but somehow the plans were put into action by a divinity of a lower order, a Craftsman or Creator, who (i) had to do his best with changing/dynamic materials or, (ii) made mistakes in the creative process. A third variation is that God’s “Wisdom” was the instrument of creation, somehow, she got too big for her shoes and tried on her own, or through a son of hers, etc., etc. One way or another, man is stuck with the dilemma that he is caught up in this dismal anti-Eden and needs to get back. He needs divine help and especially knowledge (gnosis) to overcome his earthly problems and to find his way back. The gnostic answer is in the spiritual “image”, “breath” or Spirit of God, given to humankind at his birth; but, unfortunately went “to sleep”, “is forgotten”, making him “living but dead” or is hidden from him, through “earthly” and sometimes spiritually alien powers; we have to re-discover this Spiritual element and nurture it to dominance again; we must “die to” the old self and life and be “reborn” or “resurrected” to our eternal Spirituality.

The later, orthodox Christian view, to distinguish itself from the rest of humanity and other Christian groups, professed a “once only” Incarnation of the Image or Spirit of God and only those who “believe” in this unique incarnation will be saved. The question now is what must be the sufficient content of this “belief” to be effective for salvation? What about the unfortunate people who lived on the other side of the world or who died centuries before? How and by what believable mechanism can “faith only”

save a human soul? What about praxis, does it have no salvic value at all? If you don't bear the moral fruits of your beliefs, are you still saved? What is the real status of a believing brute? To explain their uniqueness, reasonable answers to these complex questions had to be supplied; answers about mercy, justice, praxis and a supposedly unpartisan, loving Creator who created everybody with free will, powerful reasoning abilities to negotiate and tame reality, very unlike the "angels". These issues force every spiritual seeker, of all times and persuasions, to try to make sense of life and God. The orthodox Christian answer seems to be the most difficult to explain or understand because to many of the answers rely on dogmatic beliefs only. This prerequisite of blind belief in our spiritual quest is threatening the very core of humankind's distinctive essences and makes it virtually impossible for us to adjust responsibly to the challenges of life's realities without serious rational and emotional conflicts.

I did not find the study of the different outer mysteries or myths of gnostic groups very rewarding until I realised that they are just other versions of the universal Mysteries phenomenon. Their real value lies also in their inner teachings, which we unfortunately can only deduce from the prudent lifestyle of the more reputable gnostic groups. They were in essence "public mysteries" as were the very early Thomas, Pauline and Johannine type groups, which continued to exist until much later. Many Church Fathers complained about the gnostic elements in the church; they had the habit, the Fathers objected, to agree with the creeds and then went off after church to hold informal and, mind you, "unauthorized" private meetings to practise their private "heretic beliefs". Virtually everybody classed Christianity as a new Mystery. (Riley 1997:147)

In the gospels of the New Testament, says Pagels (1994:3), "the claim is made that Jesus rose once from the dead, bodily, and disappeared bodily into heaven. The Gospel of Philip is another gnostic gospel, found at Nag Hammadi, and it ridicules this idea as the faith of fools. It says the Resurrection is a moment of transformation of existence. The Resurrection is moving from death to spiritual life. It is very much like some Buddhist

teachings, talking about moving toward the moment of enlightenment and the understanding of reality. They do not deny the possibility or even the reality of life after death. What they don't believe in is bodily life after bodily death."

At Alexandria, says Pagels (1994:4), "the Christian scholars Clement and Origen believed that the synoptic gospels provided a literal, historical account of Jesus work, while John composed an allegorical version, which gave the inward, spiritual meaning of Jesus. This was not John's own opinion, however. Origen sometimes argued that all four gospels were partly historical and partly symbolical while relating the first mainly to the first phase of spiritual development and the latter esoteric interpretation to a more mature spirituality. Gnosticism is not so much being born again or instantaneous enlightenment, (that may come later) but a willingness to make some sort of spiritual search. At least that is what the Gospel of Thomas says." And what's different about the gnostic gospels, says Page, "is that they have different perceptions of Jesus. If you look at the gospels of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all claim that Jesus was a very unique being in the history of the world, that His coming and what happened to Him is enormously important, and that the salvation of everyone in the world turns on what happened to Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospel of John says He is the only begotten Son of God, and if you believe in Him, you are saved. If you don't believe in Him, you're condemned. Other gospels that were found have a very different message. As the Gospel of Thomas says, 'If you come to know yourselves, then you will know that it is you who are the children of God, and the kingdom of God will be found within.' So, the message here is that every person can discover that he is, so to speak, Jesus' twin brother." (Pagels 1994:4)

Therefore, one's conception, either argued for, intuitive or adopted, of God, his creation, his plans and the nature of man and life's realities, forms the basis of your speculative spiritual philosophy, theory of faith or explanation of your religious beliefs. This theoretical belief construct could develop from a primarily faith basis into gnosis if it makes "inner sense", and therefore will

manifest in a moral, contemplative life. Joining up with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, it becomes an examined and planned life, lived in a loving, virtuous way as a matter of habit, with due respects to the god within, who reveals to you the desired course.

It is not very productive for our purposes to classify Gnostic Systems according to the detail of their myths or outer mysteries. The gnostic, like any other religious, speculative philosophy originating in a specific group had charismatic leaders of above average intelligence and were very creative. The effort only reveals the vast differences in imagery preconceptions and biases and is not very helpful from a standpoint of seeking general "truths". If, however, one looks beyond the outer mysteries to the lessons seemingly to be deduced from these symbolic mythical constructions then they have more in common. Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15: 17) is an excellent example of the gnostic quest. One has to go through the pleasure and power phases, come to your senses, repent and make definitive decisions and then act decisively on them before the return process of going back to the father, who has never forgotten you, can commence. Like the hero in the Greek legends, he needs to know himself, overcome his weaknesses and eventually triumph over himself with the help of a divine element. This is the common inner truth of all spiritual systems. Whether you employed in your outer mystery the help of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Zoroaster, Moses, Seth, Adam or Philo, Stoics ideas, Neo-Platonian ideas, Neo-Pythagorean ideas, or the help of Sophia, the Heavenly Man, a standard or novel Cosmic hierarchy, is eventually immaterial. There is a need for self-knowledge, a heavenly Revealer of gnosis, the knowledge to get you out of Egypt into the Promised Land, and only you can do the necessary work to get yourself back on your way to God or Heaven. This fact was well known and applied by Apollonius to reform all religions that deviated from this wisdom.

All these efforts to understand God the world, as well as man's role in it all, is therefore gnostic in nature. It is based on a universal wish to understand even the seemingly unfathomable facts of life. Gnosis yields redemption and Irenaeus tells us that for the Valentinian gnosis was the redemption of the

inner, spiritual man and not the body or the soul. Elaine Pagels (1989: xix) explains to us that gnosis could be sensitively translated as "insight". God has to be looked for inside oneself rather than externally, because if you look for the kingdom of God in heaven or in the sea, "the birds and the fish will proceed you. Rather, the kingdom is inside you, and it is outside you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are in poverty," says Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas, Saying three.

As used at present, the terms gnosis, gnostic and gnostics are loaded, depending from which camp you approach them, and that makes this a very confused field of study. We need to exercise special care not to misuse them as names for alternative or "heretic" theological views, used for those who are not of our group. In principle, the concept gnosis wants to describe a type of knowledge that should follow on spiritual maturity as a form of experiential and intuitive insight following from a contemplative life in the faith, and coming from the Spirit of God. From this perspective any professed knowledge of God, the Spirit of God within us or without, as well as his alleged plans through revelation by a person or a group, is a form of "gnosis", a kind of spiritual knowledge. Then all persons who profess such special, non-scientific knowledge, are "gnostics". Because there is no way that we can verify "gnosis" scientifically, we either accept the revelation of someone else, his/their gnosis, but then it is for us, just a form of faith. Alternatively, we had a special spiritual experience, or have an intuitive certainty that may be coupled to reason and logic, that "convinced" us internally that it is true, or both; then only do we share in this "gnosis" because we are co-owners. Accepting someone's, or a group's, revelations is therefore an "act of faith"; only when you, through a personal experience of appropriation and through intuitive certainty, authenticate this second-hand faith to become your own truth, does it become gnosis, also for you. You then do not "believe" any more. You know for yourself that it is true. It is your truth, not static but dynamic. It can and should grow and change with personal development and especially towards spiritual maturity. It is this type of knowledge that enables

us to say with Carl Jung, shortly before his death, "I do not believe in God, I know there is a God."

Except for, perhaps, certain physical sciences all other human sciences will not have universal and final truths, because the natural laws of growth, change and complexity that govern our changing reality are dynamically interrelated. So basically gnosis is a form of "internal knowledge" or insights pertaining to non-scientific personal spiritual realities, or metaphysical intuitive appropriation of personal truth claims, through own experiences, therefore resulting in mystical or intuitive knowledge. It is always on the faith-side of "knowledge", not scientific but personal and dynamic truths, of which you feel that it makes internal sense and helps you to understand the mysteries of life and death; a metaphysical or spiritual philosophy, if you will; also called speculative philosophy or even "heresy" by others or "outsiders".

This internal knowledge or gnosis usually relates to the nature of God, his creation and our relationship to his creation, his plans for his creation and also his physical and ethical laws for humanity, supposedly the most rational and moral creatures of his creation. It is very important to realise that only the physical laws of nature and of humankind, steadily migrated out of the domain of myth and faith to science. Gnosis ideally should represent the "reasonable" beliefs, converted to the status of personal truths or facts, by the workings of internal, intuitive logic, and only from that point onwards where science becomes unable to "know" anymore. Otherwise, according to Aristotle, your beliefs will remain on the level of "mere" opinion and cannot even be regarded as an informed opinion. Revelations about God and his plans remain in the mythic and faith realm for "outsiders". All three of the main perspectives on gnosis starts off with faith of some definition, whether it be that from the "divine book" type or faith maturing into the individual mystical, experiential gnostic or, lastly, from those beliefs that become gnosis through contemplative, meditative and philosophical effort. Although the latter is based partly on some scientific principles they all share in personal subjectivity as personal truths only.

Religious philosophies or philosophic religions are very important to mankind; it constitutes his understanding and strategy for living. Due to the central belief of most “divine Book” groups, that they know the impossible, the infinite God by special invitation and supernatural revelation and that only they know what “He” really wants from us, makes them potentially very dangerous. Because there is no room for critical and open debate or revision of the “facts”; especially if they believe they already have the whole Truth and have a “direct command” from God to convert other “heathens”. It can become a sort of “holy madness” which is quite in contrast to Plato’s conception of this term, of being an irrational, unconditional love; no, they want to force everybody to submit to “God’s Will”, according to their specific belief system, even if they need to torture or kill them to “save” them!

Inherent in gnostic philosophy is the recognition therefore that gnosis can only be personal and all that we can do for one another is to help by sharing our own truths. It is obvious that the Gnostics will not make a good “universal unchanging creed” type of church member. The Saviour of the gnostics is a Revealer of divine or spiritual knowledge called gnosis, revealed to us by the spirit of God within. That is precisely how they experienced Jesus and why they had such a high regard for his teachings and life, while ignoring the literal resurrection lore as the faith of fools. To them, Jesus was a “Revealer of truth”, of gnosis, through his teachings and his lived life, to be followed in your own unique way; to have “faith” in Jesus meant to be “faithful” in following him, to live his teachings and to aspire to become like him, a veritable spiritual hero. This is very obvious also in Paul’s teachings. His emphasis that he teaches the “resurrected Christ” is a specific indication that he teaches the inner meaning of the spiritual resurrection of all mature spiritual people; to become like Christ through the Spirit that was also in Christ. Then you have long passed the simple faith phase, or even worse, are still stuck in the salvation by ethics and law phase, which was in any case mostly motivated by ethnic vanity that makes only spiritual nonsense. The saviour is definitely not a divine sacrifice for the sake of divine justice as demanded by God, which you need to “believe” in to earn His grace, and then to have “believed” yourself into everlasting life.

The matter of spiritual succession or growth, from faith to gnosis to praxis, which should materialise, and for the right reasons, is the greatest challenge to all belief systems or spiritual philosophies. The point here is that all belief systems of all religions should have a gnostic phase, which follows on the spiritual “babe” phase as Paul indicated and Origen, as well as Clement of Alexandria, agreed. The “pistic” Christian responds through discipline and lives on the level of law, says Clement (2001:3) while the “gnostic” Christian responds through the discipline of love and lives on the level of the gospel. They describe it as faith maturing into gnosis, which again matures into intuitive moral behaviour that does not need any external laws; free from laws forever. Again, Paul would agree.

A further very important point is that all religious systems, starting with Greek myth and legends to the Jewish “history” of Moses, Egypt and the promised land, through to our own Christian narrative gospels and the parables of Jesus, are firstly symbolic while having the “look” of history or reality to remember it by, while it also contains the next layer of the story; the essential moral teaching. Therefore, simple faith relates to the literal story or “revelation”, while mature faith or gnosis pertains to the moral and esoteric meaning behind the narrative. In all of the ancient religious systems the “outer mysteries” are the introductory level to our spiritual journey, representing a call to spirituality and leading to the first level of initiation, which confirms our belief in the system and its stories as well as its ethical teachings. Through a form of catechism the spiritual infant is trained, leading to baptism, if he accepts the belief system. You are then part of the congregation of “believers” through your faith in the outer mysteries and have now promised to start a new life by accepting the teachings and therefore to abide by the ethical and social laws that rules the group’s activities. The next step in spiritual development is based on personalised tuition according to cognitive and spiritual awareness and maturity and leads to the inner mysteries which are experiential and intuitive and should result in “gnosis”; own personal religious convictions or truths, maturing in intuitive moral behaviour and character integrity. When you reach this stage of spiritual development you are allowed, in some groups

even expected, to create your own symbolic system or myth, which would explain or represent your own authentic spiritual insights and experience or gnosis, revealed to you or convinced through the grace of the Spirit within, or Holy Spirit, if you will, which now should rule your life. This can, of course, be misused, faked or forged by creating nonsensical mythological constructs or linking mythical-philosophical concepts to “prove” to others your “gnostic insights”, or it can become clear through a profound personal spiritual experience or “revelation” like the one Paul or other prophets claimed to have had, or developed over time in the process of spiritual growth.

4.7 Judaism

Taking into consideration that Judaism is the foundational religion for both Christianity and Islam it is not possible to understand either of them without reference to the parent religion. The history of Judaism can also only be properly understood within its ancient Middle Eastern setting. The pre-Mosaic period of the religion of the patriarchs prepares the scene for the Egyptian sojourn followed by the Mosaic phase of the religion up to the settlement in Canaan and culminating in the period of the united monarchy. This period is, to my mind, the historical and literal “identity phase” in which Judaism and Israel worked out and defined their national and religious identity. Their God was basically also a tribal god but, in contrast to the other groups and nations, theirs was a jealous god that did not share power in the ancient pantheon.

Under David, Solomon and the prophets, Judaism and Israel prospered and came to be respected amongst the nations. The special military talents of David, coupled with a profound spirituality, were now the new benchmark of a king and spiritual leader. The integrity of the prophets and the Wisdom of Solomon, who also built the temple, was indicative of the glory of Judaism.

The decay of the two kingdoms and the Babylonian exile marked a whole new phase of consolidation, rethinking, and borrowing and reconstitution of many concepts and explanations. Many theological problems needed answers. God

had chosen Israel and the covenantal promises were coupled to obedience to his laws and commandments. Things went terribly wrong with Israel and God's Servant is suffering. Collective guilt and punishment of the entire nation do not seem to be right in the case of righteous and God-fearing individuals.

The Persian religious philosophy and particularly that of the moral prophet Zoroaster seems to answer some questions better than the older Jewish traditions. If God is totally good, evil must be explained in its collective and individual manifestations, at least partially, as the work of the devil. If God's righteous servants are suffering in any case, what then is salvation and how does one attain it? Their uncomplicated theology needed some help.

In the Jewish Bible, Posner (1975 vol. 1:115) says, there are no articles of faith or dogmas by which the Jew is commanded to believe. Belief in God's existence and infinite ability is taken for granted and is the basis of their Bible. This is the importance of the story of the Exodus from Egypt; the Children of Israel witnessed God's wonders and passed on the record of their own personal experience to their descendants. The biblical word, *emunah*, (and its other forms) which is often translated as "belief" really means "trust" or "confidence," which is something quite different. This is in my opinion a very important point; to trust or to have confidence is a better motivator than mere belief, which still does not have a cognitive component.

There is no catechism (i.e., a creed of belief) even in the Talmud. Although the rabbis did enumerate those ideas in which a person must believe in order to merit "a portion in the world to come" they did not compile a list of the fundamental dogmas of Judaism. In discussions throughout the Talmud and midrashic literature there is material on the subject and this material was the basis for later developments.

It is important to realise that the different laws of Judaism were actually meant to rule different aspects of the total Jewish reality. "An eye for an eye" is correct for civil justice, but not amongst loving members of a family or

community, as Jesus pointed out. Later, says Posner (1975 vol.6:24), it seems that various groups began to specialize in different aspects of this oral tradition. Priests, for example, collected many laws pertaining to sacrifice and other activities conducted in the Temple. Judges collected laws having to do with commerce, and students of revered scholars collected the interpretations of biblical passages taught by their teachers. Quite probably, these laws and teachings were never written down. Specialists known as *tanna'im* ("repeaters") committed specific areas to memory. They then "repeated" the memorized material before the teacher who explained its meaning to his students. Inevitably, different schools of interpretation developed, each with its own understanding.

The Jewish Bible assumes that God exists, that He hears and is moved by prayer. It also assumes that man has an inborn, spontaneous yearning to communicate with God and that he turns to Him instinctively, without being commanded to do so. Sometimes man's turning to God comes from his feeling of helplessness, his fear of the future, and his need to petition God for help. Sometimes he wishes to communicate his thankfulness to God because he feels that God does care about him, or because he feels that God has saved him from danger. Often in the Bible, someone expresses his own sense of failure and his desire to be forgiven. Several times a biblical personality finds it necessary to communicate his disapproval of God's planned action, and to urge Him to "change His mind". In general, biblical prayer was spontaneous and personal; the more formal aspect of worship probably consisted of bringing sacrifices at set times and with fixed ritual. It seems, however, that even during the period of the First Temple there were already some prayers whose wording was set and which were always recited on certain specific occasions.

According to many scholars (Posner 1975 vol.6:25), the Jews had a special way of shaping reality and that way was by the shaping of their Bible. The Bible of the Jews contoured time and experience. By incorporating other concepts, such as that of the devil and the apocalyptic ideas of the Persians,

they rewrote, edited and incorporated the new ideas to explain the dilemmas of life and the righteous.

The apocalyptic belief held that the end of the physical world was imminent and that this would be followed by the advent of the Messiah and the establishment of the kingdom of God. Believers in apocalypse turned their attention from the sufferings of the real world in which they lived to the promise of an approaching Divine world, in which the wicked would be punished and the righteous rewarded. The recently discovered scrolls of the Dead Sea Sects provide one of the best examples of this literature. The rabbis of the Talmud did not view this belief in apocalypse favourably, which accounts for the exclusion of the apocalyptic books from the canon of the (Jewish) Bible. (Posner 1975 vol.2: 105). Fredriksen says that in fact, later on, these apocalyptic writings virtually got out of hand. So many varieties of pronouncements of the expected intervention of God at the so-called end times, to ensure the triumph of "good" over bad, only encouraged arguments and disputes. Fredriksen (1998:2) says that you get different types of description of what this triumph will be. "You have descriptions, for example, of a battle between good and evil. Sometimes it's led by angels, sometimes there's a figure designated the Messiah who leads the forces of good. Often, God himself, or maybe a chief angel, does the fighting. In some of these writings you get a description of the resurrection of the dead. Some of them talk about Jerusalem being rebuilt and refurbished, or the Temple being made splendid and beautiful. Some of the prophets who were in the Jewish canon or, for the Christians, the Old Testament, are read apocalyptically in this period so that passages in Isaiah are seen as describing the end of time. I think what this means is that people who have this conviction believed that God, as being all good and all-powerful, would intervene definitively in history. Sometimes the idiom used is that God would establish his kingdom and that would be the end of evil. Sometimes you have a resurrection of the dead, or an in-gathering of Israel, which has been scattered in exile. Also in some traditions you have discussions of gentiles; once the God of Israel reveals himself in glory, gentiles bury their idols and they turn and they all go together with Israel and there's a great big party at the Temple. But the pressure is

taken off the Priests because, says Fredriksen, according to Isaiah 25, God himself does the cooking and he serves the meal for Jews and gentiles to eat together at the Temple, once his kingdom is established.

“The interesting thing about an apocalyptic sensibility is that we find it scattered throughout the Diaspora writings. We have it in Greek writings and we have it in Semitic language writings. It’s something that’s not specific to a locale, although with the Qumran library, and with certain writings that show up in the New Testament, it is clear that there were pressures brought to bear. If one was living in the land of Israel that would make a religious interpretation of current politics lean in the direction of an apocalyptic resolution. ‘How am I to know, as a Jew living in the first century, when all of this is going to happen? Is it going to happen soon?’ ” (Fredriksen 1998:3)

“If we look at the fully developed doctrine of Millennialism that was consequently developed one is annoyed by the complexity of the process and can recognise many Mediterranean imports. That this could serve as an example of a well developed, imaginative doctrine on the ‘last things’, which was part of the conventional wisdom of religion.

1. There will be a period know as the Great Tribulation. Within this period, the believers of Jesus the Messiah will be persecuted for their faith, just like the believers in the Apostle John’s time.
2. After the Great Tribulation, Jesus the Messiah will return (His Parousia) and bodily resurrect the sleeping (dead) believers while simultaneously changing (transforming) the living believers into glorified bodies as Jesus exemplified, following His bodily resurrection.
3. Jesus the Messiah will order the binding of Satan for 1000 years and Jesus will reign with His people in Jerusalem (and Israel) over all the Earth. It will be comprised of mortals and immortals living together while the King, Jesus dispenses justice and righteousness throughout the Earth.

4. After the 1000 years, Satan will be released and inspire one more revolt of cosmic proportions against Messiah and His people. Satan and his followers will be cast into the Lake of Fire, tormented day and night forever.
5. Upon the final defeat of Satan, the Second Resurrection and Great White Throne, Judgment will commence. Those whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life will be bodily resurrected, judged and cast into the Lake of Fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.
6. The New Heavens and New Earth will be created (since the first heaven and first earth passed away) come down from Heaven and Paradise will be regained.
7. The Saints will live with their King, Saviour and Lord Jesus, in the presence of the Father, in the New Heavens and New Earth, forever and ever! Amen." (Crossan 2000:7).

It is just not possible, in my opinion, to expect that the majority of people in the 21st Century could hold these constructs as gospel truths, revealed to us from God. It is an unnecessary belief system that has no intrinsic spiritual value or logic, especially for those who accept God's challenge to rule oneself and his creation the best we can and leave the rest to Him.

The same problem of the various revelations about, and function of the different expected Messiahs will be encountered. However, in order to understand the theologies of early Christianity it is necessary to understand Judaism as best we can. Paul suggested in approximately the mid fifties C.E. that the story of Jesus had been acted out according to the scriptures (I Cor. 15: 1 – 6) but at that time there were no Christian scriptures, so this means it was according to the Jewish Scriptures.

"On the issue of good and evil, it is basic to Judaism to believe that all life is good. 'And God saw all that He had made and found it very good' (Genesis 1:31). Yet how can we fit catastrophe and pain, moral evil and sin into God's design of Creation? The earlier books of the Bible deal very little with the problem of the existence of evil. In the later books, however, questions

concerning the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous become familiar. The question appears in Jeremiah, in Isaiah, Job and Psalms, and various answers have been given by Talmudists and philosophers. Evil initiated by man himself is considered the product of his evil inclination, the 'yezer ha-ra', a distinct part of man's nature. Yet, it is within man's power to restrain and redirect his evil inclination with the guidance of Torah and its teachings, the only proven antidote. This self-control enables man to serve God with both his good and evil inclinations, helping him to live a good life, and to grow in holiness. The doctrine that man receives reward for his good deeds and retribution for his transgressions is the very basis of the conception of both human and divine justice. It has been central to Judaism throughout the ages and has been incorporated into every classical enumeration of the fundamental principles of Judaism", says Posner (1975 vol.2:177).

"In the Bible, (Old Testament) reward and punishment - whether individual, national or universal - is described as appertaining to this world. It is recognized as axiomatic that God rewards the righteous by granting them prosperity and well-being, and punishes the wicked with destruction. This forms the basis of the passage from Deuteronomy which constitutes the second paragraph of the Shema: adherence to God's commandments will bring 'the rain in its seasons'; disobedience will cause God 'to shut up the heavens that there be no rain, and the land will not yield her fruit.' The empirical facts which seemed to contradict this doctrine, the visible suffering of some righteous people and the prosperity of some wicked people, tormented many of the biblical writers (including Jeremiah and Job), but all eventually concluded that in the end justice will prevail.

"This brings us to the topic of sin and repentance. The very fact that Judaism has a doctrine of mitzvot means that it must also take sin into consideration. Performing a mitzvah is doing God's will; sin is doing something that is against God's will. In biblical Hebrew there are about 20 different words which denote sin, ranging from a deliberate act in defiance of what God has forbidden, to accidental, unwilling transgression. The Bible is therefore very much aware of sin", says Posner (1975 vol.5:153).

"In rabbinic theology every person has in him a 'yezer ha-tov' and a 'yezer ha-ra' — a good inclination and an evil one. The yezer ha-tov, urges man to do God's will, whereas the yezer ha-ra, entices man to sin. Thus life is seen as a constant struggle between these two elements. The rabbis, with great psychological insight, also understood that the first time a person sins, he does feel bad about it, but as he performs that sin, again and again, it no longer seems to him to be forbidden. As a result of their view of sin, the rabbis tried to give advice on how to avoid it. A person should always realise that there is a Seeing Eye and a Hearing Ear above him, and that all his sins are recorded. A person should reflect on the destiny of all human beings and realise that ultimately he will have to give account for his sins. Above all, the best protection against the evil inclination is the study of Torah.

"Although Judaism sees sin as a most serious matter, even the sinner is not without hope. One of the most important theological doctrines of both the Bible and the Talmud is that if a sinner repents his bad deeds, God will forgive him. Repentance consists of several stages — firstly the sinner must reflect on his actions and realise that he has indeed done the wrong thing. He must then make up his mind never to do it again, and confess his sin. This confession is not made to any other human being but is made by the sinner directly to God.

"Repentance in Hebrew is known as 'teshuvah', which literally means 'return,' and signifies a return to God. The Rabbis taught that if a person repents out of love of God (and not just out of fear of divine punishment), all the sins he had committed are considered to be 'mitzvot.' This is perhaps the most comforting doctrine that Judaism has given to the world." (Posner 1975: 174)

"Sacrifices and prayers were once part of the act of repentance. The Hebrew term for sacrifice, *korban*, is derived from the root meaning 'to draw near' and originally denoted that which was brought near, or offered, to God. It is also possible that the term signified 'that which brings man near to God' and, indeed, a late aggadic source interprets sacrifices in this sense. As an

expression of worship sacrifices are first mentioned in the Bible in the story of Cain and Abel, and again in the accounts of Noah and the patriarchs.

“After the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE.), all sacrifices ceased, and prayer (which had existed long before and actually formed part of the Temple ritual) became the official substitute for sacrifices.” (Posner 1975 vol.5:129)

It could be helpful also to look at the very important event in the Jewish religious calendar terminating in the Day of Atonement, because it is the principal metaphor for the reason of Jesus’ death and its effects on believers. After the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) when this sacrificial ritual could no longer be carried out, the day of Yom Kippur itself was assumed to atone for Israel’s sins. “However, the sages emphasized that Yom Kippur alone is not enough; each man must repent for his wrongdoings for the Day of Atonement to have its purifying effect. Accordingly, the theme of the prayers of Yom Kippur revolves around the confessing of sins and the resolve to mend one’s ways both between man and man, and man and God.” (Posner 1975 vol.2:60)

“Judaism was also a diverse phenomenon. In Christian circles, the Judaism of the time of Jesus has often been thought of as an outward legalistic religion to which the message of Jesus and the early Christians was a complete antithesis. Such a picture has, however, proved to be a blatant caricature. Today the ministry of Jesus is seen rather as a movement within Judaism rather than as something opposed to it. At the same time people have begun to understand how complex and still developing a phenomenon first-century Judaism was. At the beginning of the Christian era Judaism was divided into many different groups. The most important were the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes, the Zealots, the Jesus Movement and mystics, with various minority groups within some parties.” (www.helsinki/judasim/htm:1)

“In the Gospels the Pharisees often appear as the influential arch-enemies of Jesus. They tirelessly watch how the Jewish people observe the purity and

holiness code. From this the word 'Pharisee' has commonly come to be a synonym for 'hypocrite'. Such a picture of the Pharisees is, however, one-sided. In fact the Pharisees were one Jewish group among many, a lay movement which placed emphasis on the Torah (the Law of Moses and its interpretation) and in particular on the importance of the purity code for everyday holiness. There were also many different types of Pharisees and most scholars now think of Jesus also as a type of Pharisee. Some of them seem to have been fairly close to Jesus in their thinking. Sayings resembling the teaching of Jesus occur among the sayings of Rabbi Hillel, for instance, and Hillel was active in Pharisaic circles." (www.helsinki/judaism.com:2)

The priesthood was a close corporation. No man who was unable to trace his descent from a priestly family could exercise any function in the Temple. However, the Pharisees and the Scribes opened a great career to all the talents. Furthermore, the priesthood exhausted itself in the ritual of the Temple. The Pharisees found their main function in teaching and preaching and by so doing, Pharisaism cleared the ground for Christianity.

"The Sadducees denied the validity of the Oral Law as developed by the Pharisees. The Sadducees also rejected the Pharisaic belief in the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, claiming that there is no basis for these beliefs in the Torah. They also disagreed with the Pharisees in regard to the question of free will, which claimed that human freedom was somewhat limited by fate. The Sadducees said: 'take away fate entirely, and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil and they say that to act what is good or what is evil, is at man's own choice...' as the ancient historian Josephus put it. Louis Finkelstein has suggested that the different economic and social positions of the two groups influenced their theology and practice. Because the Sadducees were composed mainly of rich and powerful men it was natural for them to assume that each person controlled his own affairs and received his reward during his lifetime. The Pharisees, on the other hand, reflected the beliefs of the poor and oppressed who felt limited by fate and who awaited their reward in a life after death. The rivalry of these two groups lasted until the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.). Even

before the destruction, the Sadducees had lost most of their popular support. With the Temple in ruins, they also lost the physical base of their power and disappeared from history.” (Posner 1975 vol.5: 51)

From this sketch we can see why Jesus had almost no dealings with the Sadducees during his ministry. His interests were with the common people and not the Temple cultic management. This brought him into continual political conflict with the Sadducees politically, while he had intellectual and moral quarrels with the Pharisees. It was not until his popularity seemed to threaten the peace of Jerusalem that the high priest, with the backing of the Sadducees, was moved to decisive action. We can also see why the Apostolic Church in her first years had most to fear from the Sadducees, on which authority Paul acted in the persecution of the followers of Jesus before his conversion.

“The Essene community of Qumran saw itself as the only true Israel, ‘children of light’ as distinct from the ‘children of darkness’ and their corrupt religious practices. The members of the community lived a disciplined life dictated by the regulations and a strict system of values. At the same time they - like many of their contemporaries - expected that God would soon intervene in the course of history in a decisive manner. There are also reasons for thinking that foreign influences had a hand in their constitution. They worshipped towards the sun, not towards the Temple. Their doctrine of immortality was Hellenic, not Pharisaic.” (Condensed from Hastings: Dictionary of the Bible – www.ns.net)

“The Essenes studied the Torah in minute detail and regularly practiced ritual immersion. They supported themselves by manual labour, mostly farming, and lived together as a group; holding everything in community ownership. They opposed slavery and animal sacrifice, bringing only flour and oil to the Temple. Their religious outlook was close to that of the Pharisees, but they had some beliefs and rituals all their own. They believed in reward and punishment; in immortality of the soul but not in physical resurrection. New members were admitted only after a rigid probationary period often lasting up

to three years. Initiation to full brotherhood required 14 solemn oaths, never to be violated or divulged, concerning piety, justice and loyalty. The largest group lived in the Qumran area, at the north end of the Dead Sea. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls showed the existence in that area of other isolated groups the (Dead Sea Sects) but has thus far added little information about the Essenes.” (Posner 1975 vol.2:113) The Essenes were another example of a religious group organised on the principles of the universal Mystery movement.

“Sometimes non-Jews joined the Jewish community. Those who converted and became full members were called proselytes. Becoming a member was preceded by ritual purification (baptism) and in the case of male proselytes by circumcision. At the same time the newcomers committed themselves to observing the commands of the Torah. This was a great deal to ask and the number of proselytes remained fairly small. Another associated group called the “God-fearers” were non-Jews who, instead of becoming proselytes, were satisfied with observing the Jewish way of life and taking part in the life of the Jewish community as far as it was possible. This group later became fertile ground for early Christian missionary work. Diaspora Jews also met in synagogues, the size and manner of construction of which depended on the resources of the community.

“The Purity and Holiness Code consists of regulations concerning purity and holiness and is found in many cultures in different parts of the world. The terms ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ did not then refer to cleanliness and getting dirty in the present sense of the words. Rather it was a question of the kind of actions, substances, matters, objects and places it was desired to place out of bounds for the community. In early Judaism attitudes towards the purity and holiness code contained in the Torah or Law of Moses varied: in the Diaspora, Jews were more liberal-minded than in Palestine, among the Pharisees and Essenes, stricter than these outside groups. In any case, the purity code seems to have grown in importance amongst certain groups, as the beginning of the Christian era approached.” (<http://www.helsinki.fi/~merenlah/judaism.htm>)

4.7.1 Jewish Soteriology

With this background of the variety of Jewish religious parties and sects operative in the time of Jesus we need to look at the two most important aspects of Judaism to understand Christianity, namely the question of salvation and the role of the Messiah. In a very interesting article titled “How Does a Jew Attain Salvation?” from a Jewish website (<http://www.beingjewish.com/Foshuv/salvation.html>) the Jewish argument against third party salvation is put forward. In plain language it puts the Jewish case and we will follow this argument for better understanding.

The argument starts with the Christian belief of the total corruption of man from birth. They argue that this is not true and that we are not doomed, or fated, to sin; quite the contrary. The Torah says: “If you do good, won’t there be special privilege? And if you do not do good, sin waits at the door. It lusted after you, but you can dominate it.” (Genesis 4:7)

“We have free will, and that is what Judaism has always believed because that is what the Torah teaches. The Torah does not teach – or even mention – that we are ‘born in sin’, or that we are fated to sin. Just the opposite, we have the ability to choose, which means that we can be good, or we can be evil. It is up to us; and if we can be good, that means we can be righteous, depending of course how we define the terms.

“The Jews cannot understand how or why Christians like to say that no one can be righteous in the eyes of God. The Torah says otherwise. The problem, so they argue, is that Christians do not understand the meaning of the concept ‘righteousness’. They think it means that one has never sinned; never sinning is impossible. The Torah says that ‘There is no person on earth so righteous that he does only good and never sins’. (Eccl.7:20) Rather, the definition of a righteous person is as taught in Proverbs 24:16: ‘The righteous fall seven times seven and still get up, but the wicked stumble in evil.’ Being righteous does not mean that one never sins. It means that after you sin you get back up

again, repent, and try again. You keep on trying; that is being righteous. That means your intentions are right, although you do not always succeed.

“Not only that, but even if you keep on trying but don’t succeed very well, and you have many sins, you can still be forgiven and go to Heaven. In the Book of Job (33: 23) it says that if someone has even only one merit and 1000 sins, he is rescued from hell; this wants to tell us something of the quality of God’s mercy. So we are not doomed to hell. And the wicked who repent are no longer called wicked.

“Even when I have told the wicked that he will die, but then he repents, and he does justice and righteousness; when he returns the collateral when he is supposed to, he repays what he stole, he begins to live by the Laws of Life, and does not do evil, he will live, and he will not die. All the sins that he committed will not be held against him, for he has begun to do judgment and righteousness; he shall surely live.” (Ezekiel 33: 14-16)

“We see, therefore, another fallacy of the Christians who argue that ‘sin has separated us from a perfectly holy God.’ We are not separated from God at all. All we need to do is repent. But no, say the Christians. Repentance won’t work, for some reason that we cannot understand. They claim that ‘no one can be close to God without Jesus.’ Was King David separated from God? Yet the Torah says about him that he did one thing wrong (1 Kings 15:5) and yet he was considered righteous and God was with him. (See, for example, 1 Kings 11:34; 1 Kings 18:14). Whenever a royal descendant of King David did the right thing, the Torah says about him that he followed in the ways of his ancestor David. (See, for example, Kings 14:8; 2 Kings 18:3; 2 Kings 22:2.)

“Did Moses sin? Was he close to God or not? Did Abraham sin? Was he close to God or not? I also have to wonder: if no one can be righteous in the eyes of God, how can the Torah call Noah righteous (Genesis 6:9, 7:1). ‘Noah walked with God,’ the Torah says. God called Moses and he was a trusted servant, and closer to Him than any other prophet. Moses spoke directly to God and spoke

directly to Moses. (Numbers I 2: 6–8).” (<http://www.beingjewish.com/Foshuv/salvation.html>)

E.P. Sanders (1977:180), on Judaism, says: “In his role as King, God gave Israel commandments which they are to obey as best they can. Obedience is rewarded and disobedience punished. In case of failure to obey, however, man has recourse to divinely ordained means of atonement, in all of which repentance is required. As long as he maintains his desire to stay in the covenant, he has a share in God’s covenantal promises, including life in the world to come. The intention and effort to be obedient constitute the condition for remaining in the covenant, but they do not earn it.”

“God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament; He is described as being full of grace and mercy in both testaments. Even when Moses received the Torah on Mt. Sinai, the Bible says, ‘The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...’ (Exodus 34:6f.). Here, at the heart of the law and on Mt. Sinai itself, the Lord is described in terms of mercy and grace. In fact, this is not the only place in the Hebrew Bible where mercy and grace are attributed to the Lord. The same description appears in many other Old Testament passages. The Lord of

Israel loves his people and shows them compassion. The Jewish mindset of the Hebrew authors of the Bible was dominated by the concept of divine mercy.

“While the grace of God is apparent in the Hebrew Scriptures one cannot escape the warnings of future recompense and judgment which appear in the New Testament. Just as the Old Testament is not exclusively a book of retribution and judgment, the New Testament is not exclusively a book of mercy and grace. Numerous warnings of the coming wrath of God appear in the New Testament. Because of the way Christians tried to justify their soteriology we are led not to expect judgment for wrong in the New Testament or grace in the Torah. Not only is the Old Testament deemed legalistic but also

the mainstream of Judaism from the time of Jesus. The misrepresentation of the Torah as preaching a 'save yourself by your own good works gospel' contributes to a completely distorted view of Jewish faith during the period of the New Testament. Late Second Temple Judaism therefore, the Judaism during the time of Jesus, was not a salvation by works religion! Most Jewish teachers belonging to Pharisaic and later rabbinic Judaism emphasized God's goodness and willingness to accept all sinners who repent. After a careful and in depth examination of Jewish thought from the period," Sanders (1977:421), concludes authoritatively: "The theme of mercy - whether put in terms of God's mercy in electing Israel, God's mercy in accepting repentant sinners (repentance does not earn a reward, but is responded to by God in mercy), or God's 'rewarding' the righteous because of his mercy - serves to assure that election and, ultimately, salvation cannot be earned, but depend on God's grace. One can never be righteous enough to be worthy in God's sight of the ultimate gifts, which depend only on his mercy.

"The law of love from Lev. 19: 18, was considered a summary of the whole Torah. It embodied all the commandments. If one upholds this command, one will observe the rest: "Do not take revenge on anyone or continue to hate him, but love your neighbour as you love yourself. I am the Lord." He who honestly tries to live by this command and is sensitive enough to know when he has sinned and then repents and try again is righteous in God's eyes; it is good enough for Him and no divine human sacrifice seems to be required."(Sanders 1977:422)

4.7.2 David the son of God

If we further take into consideration that David was the most respected king of Israel and that his spirituality and religious enthusiasm made him the icon on which even the Messiah expectations are modelled, then it behoves us to look at what he had to say on sin, obedience, righteousness, repentance, sacrifice forgiveness and salvation. His Psalms are some of the best spiritual prose to be found in the Bible. David, in the Psalms, had a very clear understanding of

God, sin and God's judgment, human nature, spirituality, the law and how we should live.

- “The Lord looks down from heaven at mankind to see if there are any who are wise, and any who worship him. But they have all gone wrong; they are all equally bad. Not one of them does what is right, not a single one. ‘Don’t they know?’ asks the Lord, ‘are all these evildoers ignorant?’ ” (Ps. 14:2, 4)
- But then comes the positive part, all is not hopeless, “Sincerity and truth are what you require; fill my mind with your wisdom. Remove my sin and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.” (Ps. 50: 6 – 7)
- And again the plea for God's assistance in our fight to develop the good in us: “Create a pure heart in me, O God, and put a new and loyal spirit in me. Do not banish me from your presence; do not take your holy spirit from me. Give me the joy that comes with your salvation, and make me willing to obey you. Then I will teach sinners your commands, and they will turn back to you.”
- “More than once I have heard God say that power belongs to him and that his love is constant. You yourself, O Lord, reward everyone according to his deeds.” (Ps. 62: 11 – 12)
- “You created me, and you keep me safe; give me understanding so that I may learn your laws. Have mercy on me, and I will live because I take pleasure in your law. I am as useless as a discarded wineskin; yet I have not forgotten your commands. (Ps. 119: 73, 77, 83)
- “How I love your law! I think about it all day long. Your commandments are with me all the time and it makes me wiser than my enemies. I understand more than all my teachers, because I meditate on your instructions. I have greater wisdom than old men, because I obey your commands. I want to obey your word.” (Ps. 119: 97 – 101)
- “The explanation of your teachings gives light and brings wisdom to the ignorant. Bless me with your presence and teach me your laws. You are righteous, Lord, and your laws are just. The rules that you

have given are completely fair and right. I am filled with trouble and anxiety, but your commandments bring me joy. Your instructions are always just; give me understanding, and I shall live.” (Ps. 119: 130, 135, 137 – 138, 143 – 144)

- “If you kept record of our sins, who would escape being condemned? But you forgive us, so that we should stand in awe of you. He will save his people Israel from all their sins.” (Ps. 130: 3, 4, 8)
- “Lord, I have given up my pride and turned away from my arrogance. I am not concerned with great matters or with subjects too difficult for me. Instead, I am content and at peace.” (Ps. 131: 1 – 2)
- “Lord, you have examined me and you know me. You know everything I do; from far away you understand all my thoughts. If I went up to heaven, you would be there; if I lay down in the world of the dead, you would be there (Ps. 139: 1, 2, 8,9) And again, “Examine me, O God, and know my mind; test me and discover my thoughts. Find out if there is any evil in me and guide me in the everlasting way.” (Ps. 139: 23 – 24)
- “A good man’s words are wise, and he is always fair. He keeps the law of his God in his heart and never departs from it. A wicked man watches a good man and tries to kill him; but the Lord will not abandon him to his enemy’s power or let him be condemned when he is on trial.” And again “I once knew a wicked man who was a tyrant; he towered over everyone like a cedar of Lebanon; but later I passed by, and he was not there; I looked for him, but could not find him.” (Ps. 37: 30 – 33, 35 – 36)
- “My song is about loyalty and justice, and I sing it to you, O Lord: My conduct will be faultless. When will you come to me? I will live a pure life in my house, and will never tolerate evil. I hate the actions of those who turn away from God; I will have nothing to do with them. I will not be dishonest, and will have no dealings with evil. I will get rid of anyone who whispers evil things about someone else; I will not tolerate a man who is proud and arrogant. I will approve of those who are faithful to God and will let them live in my palace. Those who are completely honest will be allowed to serve me. No liar will live in my

palace; no hypocrite will remain in my presence. Day after day I will destroy the wicked in our land; I will expel all evil men from the city of the Lord.” (Ps.101:1-8.Titled “a Kings Promise”).

- “O Lord, our God, you answered your people; you showed them that you are a God who forgives, even though you punished them for their sins.” (Ps. 99: 8)
- “The Lord is loving and merciful, slow to become angry and full of constant love. He is good to everyone and has compassion on all he made. They will speak of the glory of your royal power and tell of your might, so that everyone will know your mighty deeds and the glorious majesty of your kingdom. Your rule is eternal, and you are king forever. The Lord is righteous in all he does, merciful in all his acts. He is near to those who call him, who call him with sincerity. (Ps. 145: 8 – 9, 11 – 13, 17 – 18)

A very clear picture emerges from David and the Psalmists’ view on God, human nature and the world we live in. Their relationship with the Almighty is based on an understanding, which includes survival issues, but it also merged into the meaning dimension in the more matured form of Judaism. People have two distinct sides to their natures, one selfish, arrogant and material which relates to their struggle for survival; the other loving, merciful and righteous as their God’s, who they want to imitate through the study and internalising of his eternal laws. They know human frailty but also know that with the right resolve, attitude and practice, supported by the spirit of God within, they can go a long way towards being righteous as their God demands of them. They also know their God knows them because He created them and therefore knows their limitations as well as their inner motivations. With a loving, merciful, slow to anger God, who also knows them and their best efforts to serve him; if based in humbleness and truth, their efforts will be good enough to claim his grace, salvation and therefore also peace of mind. Their job is to strive for righteousness by conquering pride, arrogance and lust for power in themselves and in society at large. Then they will be the true servants of God in his kingdom and will manifest the kingdom of God.

They know sin is not the fate of human existence but a frailty to overcome in the continuing process of spiritual development. Awareness of one's shortcomings and admitting it before God make for a needed but healthy start on one's way to spiritual maturity. David, the mightiest king of his time and in the history of Israel, led the way in humbleness and in recognition of personal weaknesses while he revealed a profound strength based on his spirituality. As king, he is also the executive of civil justice and he does not stand, accommodate or employ any wicked or unspiritual people in his administration. No wonder that his kingdom became the most remarkable and exemplary one in history. Because crime and cruelty did not pay in David's administration and he was also more than qualified to be the high priest for his people. The righteous and God-fearing people came to their right in this unusual, but real kingdom of God. David was the instrument of God who fights the wicked and ignorant on the civil and religious fronts, a true priestly king in the service of God's kingdom on earth.

From a historical-critical point of view this utopian kingdom resulted in "false advertising" and the wrong impression took root that God is the "operator", and the "covenant" the instrument, which must work miracles, instead of recognising it was David and his subjects that made the difference. We need to be the instruments of His administration and execute His caring, love-miracles to our less fortunate brethren. God worked through David's spirituality and also through that of his spiritually mature administration, even though David saw it at times as God's own intervention. This ideal situation, misinterpreted as the result of the covenant operating as a contract of supernatural intervention, in exchange for obedience and sacrifices, grew progressively skew in the hands of the Cult management. Active interventionist and "contractual" acts of obedience became a formalistic cultic worship with sacrifices to obtain God's active supernatural intervention, to make us secure and prosperous. This childish religious construct has done immeasurable damage to the resolve and the willpower of people, to give their best efforts to God and his kingdom, resulting in impoverished, disempowered and passive excuses for lack of effort. This pathetic result is embodied in the doctrine of human uselessness and hopelessness, unable to do any good, now God must

do everything for them, while they must only pray, praise and believe in some future godly solutions or miraculous interventions. This is, to my mind, one of the main reasons why Dietrich Bonhoeffer started to question what went wrong with Christianity and to contemplate “The Cost of Discipleship” (1937), and why Nietzsche reacted very strongly, to the negative consequences of these doctrines on the motivation of humanity.

What are David’s and the Psalmists’ view of God’s grace, repentance, sacrifice and commandments?

- “Happy are those whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are pardoned, when I did not confess my sins, I was worn out from crying all day long. Then I confessed my sins to you; I did not conceal my wrongdoings. I decided to confess them to you, and you forgave all my sins. (Psalm 32: 1, 3, 5)
- “You do not want sacrifices and offerings; you do not ask for animals burnt whole on the altar or for sacrifices to take away sin. Instead, you have given me ears to hear you, and so I answered, ‘Here I am; your instructions for me are in the book of the Law. How I love to do your will, my God! I keep your teaching in my heart.’ In the assembly of all your people, Lord, I told the good news that you save us. You know that I will never stop telling it. I have not kept the news of salvation to myself; I have always spoken of your faithfulness and help. In the assembly of all your people I have not been silent about your loyalty and constant love. Lord, I know you will never stop being merciful to me. Your love and loyalty will always keep me safe.” (Psalm 40: 6 – 11)
- “You do not want sacrifices, or I would offer them; you are not pleased with burnt offerings. My sacrifice is a humble spirit, O God; you will not reject a humble and repentant heart.” (Psalm 51: 16 – 17) It is very interesting to see how redaction and editing were done. This psalm of David, as a prayer of repentance and a direct communication with God, after Nathan had spoken to him about his adultery with Bath Sheba, is now followed by verses 18 and 19 to “rectify” his

negative position on the issue of sacrifice; a “correction” by cultic or priestly interests?

- “My sins, O God, are not hidden from you; you know how foolish I have been.” And further on: “I will praise God with a song; I will proclaim his greatness by giving him thanks. This will please the Lord more than offering him cattle, more than sacrificing a full-grown bull.” (Psalm 69: 1, 30 – 31)

A prayer for help from David:

- “Praise the Lord, my soul, and do not forget how kind he is. He forgives my sins and heals all my diseases. The Lord is merciful and loving, slow to become angry and full of constant love. He does not keep on rebuking; he is not angry for ever. He does not punish us as we deserve or repay us according to our sins and wrongs. As high as the sky is above the earth, so great is his love for those who honour him. As far as the east from the west, so far does he remove our sins from us. As a father is kind to his children, so the Lord is kind to those who honour him. He knows what we are made of, he remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103; 2 – 3, 8 – 14)
- “Receive my prayer as incense, my uplifted hands as an evening sacrifice.” (Psalm 141: 1 – 2)

Again, there is no uncertainty here in about what David believed in. He knows that a merciful, loving God will save all those who do their best in serving the kingdom of God on earth. The believers know they falter and fall but they always stand up to do better next time. Their loving God recognizes their progress, they are his spiritual children en route to spiritual maturity. Eventually they will attain the peace that passeth understanding through their inspired efforts; in overcoming arrogance and materialism and in aspiring to loving neighbourly service in humble obedience they will be righteousness before their loving, graceful God. The spiritually immature still need the Temple rituals, sacrifices and help of the priests, but the spiritually mature know their relationship with God is personal, direct and based in responsibility to him and his kingdom alone. They know that sacrifices and Temple worship

cannot substitute for spiritual integrity and humble service to mankind to manifest a visible kingdom of God through the law which is now within and intuitive. Nothing more is needed than to walk humbly with our God and to manifest the highest values of His kingdom in our lives and societies.

It came as somewhat of a shock to my Protestant conditioned way of thinking, when I realized that the Jews, and especially David, were not in the least in need of a divine, third party saviour. He had a direct relationship with God and he knew instinctively what was expected of him in their mystic personal relationship. Only later a Messiah would be needed to replace David and his spiritual descendants as God's earthly representatives in His dual kingdom; that of the natural order and that of the spiritual order. The frightening variety of motivations and misrepresentations about this "needed" Messiah are now becoming clearer and seem to be suited more for pagan religious needs, as well as for those nationalistic, politically motivated Jews, than for the pious, righteous Israelites. David as a spiritual representative of God purged his earthly kingdom of the brutes, unjust power mongers and replaced them with spiritually matured and sensitive people of exceptional integrity. The result is obvious, simple and virtually automatic; a veritable kingdom of God manifested in both the spiritual and natural domain. David and his subjects did not need a Messiah, they could communicate directly with their merciful but righteous heavenly King, whom they served with honour, humility and integrity. They received their salvation direct from God, first hand. Why would the spiritual children of David to whom God made an eternal promise, ever need a third party saviour? Who needed the Messiah then? Could it be the worldly nationalistic "easy way out" Jews that had fallen on difficult times again, or the new Hellenistic orientated, so-called Christians who desperately needed a new God to replace the conniving lot on the Pantheon?

Alas, soon after David died and with Solomon on the throne, material and cultural projects slowly started to gain greater priority than the spiritual. The mighty kingdom of David started its spiritual decline, and the other coupled dimensions soon followed until Jerusalem was totally destroyed and the cream of the nation was deported to Babylon. Here the Jews learned from the

Persians of the perpetual battle between a mighty devil against the forces of good and that at the end of time God will send a special agent to finish him off, or even come himself to do this necessary job of justice. Between the memory of the good times with David and the coming of this special agent of God, they had a new mental construct to give them hope for the future. The myriads of later Messianic expectations were now based in history and future expectations. They were not living in the present, like David, any more. It was obvious that something was wrong, because it seemed as though God did not care for his Servant any more. Only in David's time was it obvious that God was with them, but everyone forgot that David and his people lived in God's light insofar it is possible for humankind to accomplish. What went wrong and for what reasons? How could the Cult still retain the loyalty of the Jews, even without Jerusalem and the Temple? Despite a sizable hard core of faithful believers things went from bad to worse.

Serious innovative theologizing and introspection were needed. Above all they needed hope for the future and had to convince all and sundry of the reality of their expectations. Every nation had its myths and legends of their saviours that would help them to sort out the wicked that seemed to get away with injustices. The poem by Ethan the Ezrahite, titled in Today's English Version of the Bible, as "A Hymn in Time of National Trouble", as recorded for us as Psalm 89, gives us a feel of their approach; but due to space demands we will have to leave this prayer for a Messiah for another day. However, just take note of the heading of this Hymn, and you will see what its main thrust is.

David is long dead and the history of the Jews shows that since his reign the trend went only one way, with brief exceptions. If one believes in an eternal covenant with David and his kin, but does not accept collective responsibility to enact and maintain the kingdom of God as David did, preferring to rely on supernatural intervention by God according to a perceived contract which favours the Jewish nation, then only can one begin to understand the national politics as well as the resulting disillusionment. To their mind they now desperately needed a new David to return Israel to its former glory. The covenants were interpreted mainly in favour of national interests, instead of

the spiritual kingdom of God through the servant ship of the Israel. I am now totally sure (gnosis until someone convinces me otherwise) that God's covenant with David was a spiritual one. David was the archetypal king of the kingdom of God on earth, which was also physically manifested in a very practical exemplary way by David's earthly rule of order and wisdom. His pious observance of God's spiritual and natural laws was the example of what is expected of every child of David, who will also be the archetypal children of God.

Unfortunately, literalism and nationalism clouded this profound story of the Jewish hero, who was a pure channel of God's will. From a tribal religion, where God's kingdom took second place to the Jewish kingdom, David transformed it into a spiritual kingdom in physical reality. David with his special relationship with God knew that the priorities lie differently. First, obedience to God, in service of His intended universal kingdom, through his servant Israel, who will then be respected for their spiritual excellence and courage by all the nations and to the honour of God. At the individual level, God needs many "Zaddiks", the title applied in the Bible and rabbinic literature to an individual who is considered righteous in his relations with God and man. Psalms and Proverbs are replete with praise for the righteous who act justly, because it is their greatest joy. Unfortunately the paradigm of Davidic rule, who was both king and the spiritual leader, his spectacular worldly success rather than his spiritual excellence, became the norm for Jews and the concept of kingdom was reduced and equated to a super- ethnic, national and international model.

But then, in Ecclesiastes and in some Psalms, it is sadly noted that: "There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his years by evil-doing." The underlying rationale of this problematic lies in the conception that it is basically God's part in the covenant to work the good, and ours to worship and wait for the Messiah. David knew better. He saw to it that his whole administration consisted of good, spiritually matured people, who were active in both kingdoms, that of God and that of David, and in that order. All were God's children. This

paradigm was not to be repeated again and it therefore became a false norm for a mistaken cause. Instead of God working his miracles through his righteous servants and spiritual children they belonged to a covenant where God protected the “Jews as the righteous” by supernatural means, leaving them only the task of worshipping, praising and sacrificing, while He was to deliver the “goods”. The few spiritually matured and righteous people could not turn the tide of the public and national cult, at least not till Jesus appeared on the scene.

4.7.3 Creative Messianic Expectations

Not understanding the spiritual dominance of the Davidic kingdom, or because they gave up on the masses, or both, the priestly group that made their living out of the Jewish religion had to keep the cult alive, using the Davidic paradigm as a “future returning actuality”, promised by God to David as an earthly, instead of a spiritual kingdom. The second popular paradigm was that people were led to believe that God would “eventually” break the hold of evil, now called the devil, on mankind; thereby explaining away their frustration with God’s non-delivery of the “Davidic promise” made by Him. Through intervening on a massive scale in history, at the so called end times, destroying the devil, whoever he might be, and judging and punishing the wrongdoers, while leading the rest to the new Eden or Jerusalem. From these two ideas sprang a multitude of combinations and permutations of apocalyptic prophecies from which one could choose as you see fit. The Christians later also followed the same pattern when Jesus did not turn out to be “their expected” worldly messiah and added further to the variety while ousting Judaism from the central position as beneficiary of the proposed happenings.

The sad part is that instead of recognising evil as consisting of spoiled, egocentric, power hunger, unjust or careless people, which should be the main concern of society, religion and the state. Acting together against evil people as everybody’s enemy, while jointly promote a value driven, just and caring community, acting on God’s behalf for a better world, they instead devised dogmas to tell the people what God was going to do to solve these terrible

problems! This is not a Jewish religious problem; this is a universal “religious” problem, through all nations and times, because people are stripped of their responsibility to manage reality on God’s behalf where it is within our power. They are actively kept dependable on the Church and its dogmas of human impotence and third party power brokers between them and God.

Wallace (2001:2) says that the study of the rise and development of the figure of the Messiah is primarily historical and only then theological. Confusion arises when specifically “Christian” ideas about the Messiah invade the Old Testament data. Jesus’ concept of his mission is now read back into “history”. The Son of man figured in Daniel, says Wallace, is not to be identified with the Messiah; it is later in the history of Judaism that the two figures were seen to be one. The suffering servant of Isaiah by reason of his role is yet another figure. So the Messiah or future ideal king of Israel, the Son of man, and the suffering servant were three distinct representations in the Old Testament. In the Intertestamental Writings the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are the literary remains of the evolution of messianic hopes within Judah between the testaments, says Wallace. As in the Old Testament the formal use of “Messiah” is rare. It is well to remember that in this literature there is a distinction between Messiah and messianic; a book has a messianic theme but lacks a Messiah. The book of Enoch is best known for its doctrine of the Son of man, which has many messianic overtones. Yet he is not the Messiah, but a person much like Daniel’s Son of man. It remained to the Psalms of Solomon (ca.48 B.C.) to provide the one confirmed and repeated evidence of the technical use of the term in the Intertestamental literature. This literature demonstrates, therefore, a diffuse expectation about the Messiah. It speaks of a Messiah of David, of Levi, of Joseph and of Ephraim. The Dead Sea Scrolls add to the confusion by referring to a Messiah of Aaron and Israel.

“Out of the welter of messianic hopes in this period there emerges a pattern: two kinds of Messiah came to be expected. On one hand there arose an expectation of a purely national Messiah, one who would appear as a man and assume the kingship over Judah to deliver it from its oppressors. On the other hand, there was a hope for a transcendent Messiah from heaven, part human,

part divine, who would establish the kingdom of God on earth. To the popular Jewish mind of the first two centuries before and after Christ these two concepts were not mutually hostile but rather tended to modify each other. It has been argued by some scholars that the conflation of the concepts of Messiah and suffering servant took place in the Intertestamental period, but the sole evidence for this is from the Targums, which are post-Christian.” (Wallace 2001:3)

It is obvious that the Messianic development since the Babylonian exile with its Persian imports of the apocalyptic beliefs makes a very imaginative background for variety within the broader Jewish community. With the arrival of Jesus on the scene hopes again heightened that one or other interpretation of the awaited Messiah could be manifesting.

4.7.4 The Way of Solomon

Solomon and Ecclesiastes, as translated by Rami Shapiro (1999), interestingly profess a different philosophy than Proverbs, which is still very much moulded in the ancient obedience-reward thought constructs of the cultic lore. Ecclesiastes represents intelligent, sensitive analyses of life’s realities from a spiritual point of view, much as an Eastern sage would put it. Shapiro’s (1999:1) roommate had stumbled on the fact that the Hebrew word most commonly translated as “vanity” could also mean “emptiness”. King Solomon was suddenly transformed in his eyes from Hebrew philosopher to Taoist sage. Let us look at some of the verses in Ecclesiastes and see what the writer wants to convey to us in this fresh translation:

- “There is no tranquillity in the Way To; yet the Way Of is peace itself.” (1:5-8)
- “I have explored all that is done in this world of seemingly separate things and selves, and behold—there is no profit in it. There is nothing but emptiness, impermanence, and the vain pursuit of control that arises when you do not see the truth.

- Control is your addiction, promising salvation and end to impermanence.” (1:14)
- “I have chosen the whole of life as my subject: the wise, the mad, the foolish. And yet in all my studies I can find no solid ground. There is no permanence in this world. And the pursuit of it is but chasing after wind.

“Thus do I teach:

- The more you seek security, the more you are haunted by insecurity.
- The more you desire surety, the more you are plagued by change.
- The more you pretend permanence, the more you invite suffering.
- The more you do for control, the less you do for joy.” (1:16-18)
- “Pleasure, no less than knowledge, is fundamentally empty; and both are without meaning if by meaning we seek permanence.” (2:3)
- “We desire not what we have but what does not exist: permanence, an eternity of self in a world designed by selfishness. It is not wisdom, wealth or pleasure that brings us pain, but the mistaking of these to grasp something that is not. Our quest for permanence is the root of our suffering”. (2:17)
- “Despair swallowed me. All this labour, all this wealth - and still no peace of mind! The gold of my coins outlives me.” (2:20)
- “Thus it is mine to know that to the honourable alone are granted grace and simplicity while to the fool is granted endless hunger for wealth and control.” (2:25)
- “Under the sun it is all flux and flow, diverse and separate. But under the sun is not the whole, and there is a deeper truth embracing the many in a greater One.” (3:11)
- “When hungry – eat. When thirsty – drink. When tired - rest. When injustice reigns – resist. When suffering – feel compassion. In this lies tranquillity of body, heart, mind and soul.” (3:12)
- “God pursues you with peace, offering each moment for your appreciation. There is no profit in rejection. But with acceptance comes tranquillity.” (3:12-15)

- “From the order of nature I turned my attention to the order of society. I looked for justice and found corruption. I looked for righteousness and found evil.”
- “The righteous accept the flow and find the Way. Letting go of time, they enter eternity; letting go of self they find tranquillity. The wicked insist upon controlling time, forcing the world to conform their will. Theirs is a battle unending. And the prize is only fear.” (3:16-17)
- “God tests you with truth – all things are as empty as the wind. Will this free you to live, or frighten you to death?” (3:18-20)
- “Thus I understand the simple truth of life: there is nothing better than for you to rejoice in every deed done in harmony with the moment. For doing is your purpose; in doing is your meaning. Leave the result to those who come after you, and attend solely to doing well that which must be done at all.” (3:22)
- “And all this because you are blind to truth and bound to the illusion of separate selves and permanence with which you brand your world.” (4:3)
- “Be careful when drawing near to God. Seek not to sacrifice or appease; seek only to hear.”
- “The fool rushes into sacrifice, hoping to buy what is free to all.”
- “Better to stand silent to listen. Better to be taught by Silence than distracted by teaching. Better to receive wisdom than to give in to illusion.” (4:17)
- “When standing before God you rush to speak, your heart bursting with needs and urgency. You crowd the air with words of praise and pleading. You leave no room for Silence and none for hearing. It is not God you worship, but your own voice and opinion.”
- “Better to stand in Silence. Do not rush your words, but seek to quiet them. With a quiet mind, a heart still and silent, you will see the infinity of God and the finity of self. Humility will embrace you, and you will fade into That Which Is All That Is. Your words will be few; the Silence, great. There is room then for listening.” (5:1)
- “Your days are scarred by anxiety, illness, and anger. Nothing is as we insist it be. Everything is as it is meant to be.” (5:16)

- “What shall you do? Work yourself to distraction? Distract yourself from work? Neither extreme is desirable. Better the middle way: eat and enjoy your food in the company of friends; work and enjoy the capacity of body and mind. In this world of seeming separation and divided minds, there is no escape from impermanence. Do not build a fortress against loss or lay siege to eternity. Rather open your eyes to the wonder of the fleeting and make of each moment an opportunity to do what needs doing. Your days are few and you cannot know which will be your last. Appreciate the moment. Sharpen your mind. Live with attention. Live without expectation. And let sorrow and joy take care of themselves.” (5:17)
- “One who places hope in work, saying, - “My effort shall be counted and bring me reward,” is no better than one who roots hope in suffering, saying, - “My pain shall be noted and bring me compensation.” Both seek to control tomorrow, and in this they are equally foolish.”
- “It is death that haunts you – death, impermanence, meaninglessness. You cannot buy your way out of these. You cannot barter poverty for peace. Neither possessions nor the avoidance of possessions brings joy. Only touch both lightly, clinging to nothing and entering fully into the passing moment and what it brings.” (6:7-10)
- “There are so many things to which you can cling. All of them bring suffering, for clinging is the cause of suffering.”
- “The light of truth cannot be purchased. It is free to all who would but step into it.”
- “Do not be misled by those who promise reward in the world to come. This is ego and vanity, a chasing after wind. Be not distracted from the moment. Do right in this world and let the rest take care of itself.” (6:11-12)
- “Better patience than overconfidence – allowing what is, to ripen into what will be rather than seeking conformity to your own desires.” (7:6-9)
- “It is good to have both wealth and wisdom, though do not imagine that either will bring you peace.”

- “Knowledge guards the mind from deception. Wealth protects the body from hunger. But only acceptance of impermanence brings tranquillity.” (7:10-12)
- “Consider the working of Reality; learn to set right what you have done wrong.”
- “There is good. There is evil. And both dwell within you.”
- “When you do right, rejoice, but do not proclaim yourself righteous. This was but one moment; in the next you may do differently.”
- “When you do wrong, reflect. But do not call yourself evil. This was but a moment; in the next you may do differently.”
- “For this is the Way of Reality: good and evil entwined as one. Deny neither; Take responsibility for both; and live with integrity. When you die you leave only dust behind. (7:13-14)
- “I have seen good people needlessly die despite their goodness. I have witnessed the wicked triumph despite their wickedness. And there is no explanation.”
- “Those who seek salvation in wisdom and righteousness never become truly righteous. Their desire to escape impermanence destroys their capacity for joy. In the end they die, anxious, exhausted, fearful, and no less troubled for all their learning.” (7:15-16)
- “Better to accept both goodness and evil and know your capacity for both. In this way you avoid pride and prejudice, being thankful for the good you achieve and making amends for the evil you do.”
- “Do not rend the spiritual material. There is but one road in Life, and all walk upon it. Both body and soul walk this path, and you walk it best when they walk it together.”
- “One who understands reality speaks neither of the body or the soul; but only of That which manifests them both.” (7:17-18)
- “Be wary of wisdom not rooted in Reality. There is no one easier to fool than yourself.”
- “Through wisdom be more powerful than armies, nothing can protect you from making mistakes. The righteous too do evil, and even the wicked have accomplished some good. Good and evil are a part of all

things. Wisdom that does not reveal your responsibility for both is not wise.” (7:19-20)

- “I have exhausted the wisdom of the sages. I have observed every aspect of life under the sun. I had hoped to go beyond these, but I found a limit to the mind. I had thought to probe the deeper truths: What was the world before it was the world? What is the purpose of all that was, is, and will be? But these are truths beyond thought and observation, and before them we must be silent.” (7:23-24)
- “Why is this wisdom so rare among us? God fashions us with the capacity to know truth and do good; but we devise many schemes to promote ignorance and excuse evil.” (7:28-29)
- “None compares to one who knows the Way of all things. Such knowing brings light to the face and softens all one’s features. So let me counsel you: Adhere to the Way and attend to Reality.”
- “Do not run from truth, insisting upon bending what is to conform to what you desire. Reality is what it is; it is you who must do the bending. For Reality flows of its own accord. Power belongs only to That Which Is; you cannot bend the whole.” (8:1-4)
- “One who attends solely to Reality avoids unnecessary suffering and intuits the Order that binds the chaos of the world. For there is order to everything, despite the evil one perceives.”
- “Just as you cannot command the wind, just as you cannot ward off death, just as you cannot ensure peace, so you cannot escape the consequences of your deeds: evil consumes evil; good invites good.” (8:5-8)
- “When I set myself to observe and study all that passes for wisdom, to perceive all that takes place on earth, and to uncover the Way of Reality that is written on the heart of every being, I realized that I cannot reduce the Whole to limits of the part.”
- “The ordinary person cannot fathom the Way. Nor can the wise uncover it. And any who pretend to know are themselves fools or worse.” (8:16-17)
- “It seems wrong that the same fate comes to all. You want rewards and punishments in accordance with what you do. You want a prize

cherished by all but reserved for a few. But who are you to want or denounce? You who live under the sun in a world deluded by visions, dogma, ego. Madness comes from your self-obsession. Only death ends the struggle for performance. Mercy comes from not dividing, from moving beyond the limitations of self.” (9:3)

- “Even the most pious cannot be certain of eternity. Better a living dog than a dead lion. Do not live this life as a prelude to the next. Your loves, your hates, your jealousies – all gone, for these are the stirrings of a restless mind deluding itself with autonomy and isolation. Better die now while you still live than to live now enslaved to fear of death.” (9:4-6)
- “Dying now - go eat your bread in simplicity, appreciation, and joy. Drink your wine with a heart unburdened by yesterday and tomorrow. Reality takes care of itself. You are simply its means; leave the ends to God.”
- “Do not seek to escape the ordinary. Do not denigrate the body. Keep your clothing clean and your appearance neat. Do not pretend to holiness, for all are befuddled by Reality.”
- “Live joyfully with a lifelong companion. Accept the impermanence of all things. Accept the interdependence of all things. Seek not to escape your fate, but embrace whatever you encounter with simplicity, humility, grace, courage, honesty, and humour. Labour and love as best you can, welcoming success as well as suffering. Heed my words well: There is nothing better than this.” (9:7-9)
- “Seek not to buy your way out of the grave. Seek only to spend yourself wisely in life.” (9:10)
- “Even if the foolish choose a path to follow, it is quickly abandoned as another suddenly appears more alluring. This is the sign of a fool: no purpose, just passion.” (10:2-3)
- “Do not excuse evil with reference to intent. The thought does not count, and your actions have consequences. You have choice now and again; the responsibility what you do is yours alone. (10:5)
- “Those who shatter the moral order will themselves be bitten by the snake of injustice.”

- “If the axe is blunt, it requires enormous effort to wield it. Wiser to sharpen the blade and do what needs doing with the least effort. The foolish multiply words, hiding their lies in a tower of confusion.”
- “The future cannot be revealed, only encountered. The past cannot be changed, only accepted. The present requires action and attention, but to this the fool is oblivious.” (10:12-15)
- “The foolish mistake power for purpose, wine for joy, money for salvation. Yet so great is their fear that they watch every tongue.” (10:16-20)
- “Toss your bread upon the sea – your fate to unfold as it will. Cast a net of kindness far and wide. Worry not about profit; simply do what is right with compassion.”
- “The future is uncertain; you can plan, but there is no promise. But there is no such certainty in human affairs. Act without hesitation; do what is right without thought of reward or consequence.” (11:1-4)
- “You cannot know the fate of an embryo in its mother’s womb. Pray all you want; the child’s fate is not yours to control. Just as your eye cannot see itself, so you cannot know the workings of God. Therefore, commit yourself to justice and mercy from your youth; do not become lax in old age. You are the doing of the world – do what is right. You cannot predict success or avoid failure. Act without reward, and the act will be your reward.” (11:5-6)
- “Rejoice in the awesome beauty of nature: it is a balm to the eyes to see the sun rise.
- “Life itself is a wonder. As long as you live, live in awe. And remember – some days are bright, others are dark, and both are life’s shadow play. Make no snare for the light; there is no salvation in holding on. Make no drama of the dark; there is no reward for suffering. Rather, embrace each as it is, knowing that true joy resides in serving each moment in peace.” (11:7-8)
- “There is a bliss that comes with ageing, but it is lost to those who insist on youth beyond its time.” (11:10)
- “How shall you live, in youth and in age? Keep God with you always; let the One Who Is All shine through all that are one.”

- “Walk with God in youth, bend with God in age; and your last days will be no less than your first. When the end-times come and you have no desire for tomorrow, be neither angry nor despairing; know that all things come to pass arising from and returning to the One Who Is the Source and Substance of All.” (12:1)
- “The dust of you returns to earth and the breath of you returns to the One Who Breathes Us All; before all this, know: The whole of life is empty of permanence; there is no certainty, no surety, on salvation to lift you out of impermanence.” (12:2-8)
- “The words of the wise guide us to right living. They are like well-fastened nails with broad heads holding boards fast to their place. And they all come from the One Who Guides Us All.”
- “In sum, the Assembler taught us well: stand in wonder before God, and deal justly and kindly with all that come our way. Cling to nothing and allow all to pass; and do not imagine that you can buy your way to eternity. You cannot control destiny, nor can you secure reward; yet God brings every deed to fruition, allowing even the hidden motive its due. Whether for good or for ill, the consequences of your deeds will manifest; you will reap what you sow and Order will use Chaos as it will.”
- “So when all is said, remember this: open your mind to wonder, your heart to compassion, and your hand to justice, that you fashion a whole and holy world.” (12:9-14) (Shapiro 1999:92)

What an impressive exhibit of insight and wisdom! It is very revealing how God can be equated with Reality, which is The Truth and, therefore, accessible in total to God alone. Nevertheless, it should be our quest to see reality as clearly as possible, in that we can experience Reality in the dim light of our own spirituality. God is “beyond finding out” as Plato would have put it; it is for us to acknowledge the good and the bad in us and to act on the good, but not to despair if we falter occasionally.

To scheme, plan and work for salvation is disguised vanity and is motivated by the selfish urge to obtain immortality. It is better to accept death and

impermanence, and the fact that nobody really knows what is on the other side; therefore, devoting this life to live in awe and admiration of God, enjoying and accepting what comes our way; planning as best we can but without the selfish motive of controlling the outcome. Towards others, live in harmony and loving patience while leaving salvation and the merits of our labours to God alone. There is no “Way” that could coerce God to save us, only the “right way” to realise our unique human potential as image of God, reasonable, thankful and kind, while revering and honouring God as the Reality beyond our comprehension, who takes care of the Whole. This importance of the whole instead of the parts, should also manifest in our lives, instead of forever creating division through our pathetic quest for uniqueness and self-reverence.

It is fitting to end this section by contemplating some pivotal verses again.

- Your days are few and you cannot know which will be your last. Appreciate the moment. Sharpen your mind. Live with attention. Live without expectation. And let sorrow and joy take care of themselves.” (5:17)
- “It seems wrong that the same fate comes to all. You want rewards and punishments in accordance with what you do. You want a prize cherished by all but reserved for a few. But who are you to want or denounce? You who live under the sun in a world deluded by visions, dogma, ego. Madness comes from your self-obsession. Only death ends the struggle for performance. Mercy comes from not dividing, from moving beyond the limitations of self.” (9:3)
- “So when all is said, remember this: open your mind to wonder, your heart to compassion, and your hand to justice, that you fashion a whole and holy world.” (12:9-14)

4.8 Philo of Alexandria

“Philo, an Alexandrian Jew who died in C.E. 50, tried to reconcile Jewish Scripture with Plato in an effort to make Judaism more accessible to the

Geeks. As a Jew he believed God was active in creating and ruling the cosmos but also stressed the transcendence of God who therefore acts through various intermediary powers. Philo is vague; there are sometimes two or several, but often only a single and great intermediary, the Logos. Heraclitus first used the term logos in a philosophical sense. His logos is the principle or ratio or proposition that keeps a balance between the opposing pairs of things in the world process and he described it as the principle of life intelligence. For the Stoics, the 'seminal logi' are parts of the fire or logos permeating all things, causing their growth, development and action.

"There are, of course, many uses of the term 'word' (dâbar) in the Old Testament. There are even poetical personifications of the Word of God in Psalms 33: 4- 7; 107: 20; and 147: 15. These are augmented in the Targums, the expanded tradition of the Old Testament. Dâbar is translated in the Septuagint as logos. So Philo had a term that was used in both traditions that he was trying to bring together, Jewish and Platonic. In Philo, the Logos is not only an intermediary, or instrument by which God makes the world, but he frequently identifies the Logos with the Platonic world of forms." (Allen 1985:73) Thus, it became possible for the early church Fathers to think of the three together: Divine Mind, Forms as the thoughts of the Divine Mind, and Logos as the Wisdom of God – the instrument of creation and the principle of order. (Prov. 3: 19 –20; 8: 22 –31 where creation is associated with 'Wisdom').

The identification of Jesus as the Logos in Revelation 19:13 (The Logos of God as eschatological victor and judge) owes nothing to Philo, says Allen. "Philo clearly developed the meaning of Logos with an eye to Plato and the Platonists, whereas the Johannine material develops the theme with reference to Jesus. To connect Jesus with this philosophical material at all is to make Jesus not just the Saviour or Messiah in Jewish terms but to give him cosmic significance in Hellenic terms. Clearly John 1: 1-18 intends to elevate Jesus into a cosmic role, by relating him to the creation story of Genesis 1. It is by him and with him that the world was formed. This is the thrust of John, apart from any connection with the specific identification of the Supreme Mind and

Plato's Forms or Logos. Philo did make these connections, as did the Christian theologians that followed his and John's lead." (Allen 1985:72)

4.9 Mysticism

The Encyclopaedia Britannica (britannica.com/Mysticism) distinguishes three types of mysticism that may also be discerned in the history of Judaism, "the ecstatic, the contemplative, and the esoteric. Though they are distinct types, in practice there is frequent overlapping, or mixtures between them. The first type is characterised by the quest for God – or, more precisely, for access to a supernatural realm, which is itself still infinitely remote from the inaccessible deity – by means of ecstatic experiences; this method is sometimes tainted by theurgy. The second follows the way of metaphysical meditation pushed to the limit, always bearing in its formulations the imprint of the cultural surroundings of the respective thinkers who are exposed to influences from outside Judaism; this was the case with Philo of Alexandria (c. 15 B.C.E. – after 40 C.E.) and some of the Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages who drew their inspiration from Graeco-Arabic Neoplatonism. The third type of mysticism claims an esoteric knowledge (hereafter called esoterism) that is akin to gnosis - the secret knowledge claimed by Gnosticism, a Hellenistic religio-philosophical movement but purged, or almost purged, of the dualism that characterises the latter, in what is commonly known as Kabbala (literally "tradition"). By extension, this term is also used to designate technical methods, used for highly diverse ends, ranging from the condition of the aspirant to ecstatic experiences to magical manipulations of a frankly superstitious character. If the concept of spiritual energy acting on matter and at a distance originally underlay these practices, it finally became unrecognizable and all that remained was a collection of 'tricks of the trade'."

There is evidence that mysticism existed in Judaism from very early times and, indeed, early Jewish mysticism had a great influence outside Judaism, particularly on Christianity, says Posner (1975 vol.4:7). "In the Talmud there are discussions about the Chariot of God, the Throne of God and the 'size' of God. These are based on various passages in some of the later prophetic

Books of the Bible. Mysticism was an important subject during the geonic period in Babylon. It is possible that the Jews became very interested in the subject because of their contact there with Oriental mystical religions, particularly Zoroastrianism, which taught that there is a constant struggle in the world between the powers of good and evil. This doctrine of course highlights the problem of how evil came into existence in the first instance and how it can continue to exist. Saadiah Gaon wrote a commentary to a famous mystical work called 'Sefer ha-Yezirah' (The Book of Creation), the authorship of which was attributed to the patriarch Abraham. This book and Saadiah's commentary on it became one of the most important texts in the subsequent development of Jewish mysticism."

It seems that the mystical Lore of Creation with its heavenly Adamas or heavenly Christ could have been an important aspect of Paul's theology according to Schonfield (1998:374). This opinion seems to have merit, it is clear that Paul did attain this higher state of mystical awareness, but that it was also his hope and wish for all his pupils. Paul was very serious about spiritual growth in general and most of his problems were created by spiritual "babes" that wanted to act as spiritual gurus in certain communities.

Mysticism in its purest form is best described as a mystical union with God wherein the relationship with God is felt intensely and directly and later intuitively even in daily, normal life situations. When the different techniques described above as the ecstatic, the contemplative and the esoteric are "pressed to extremes" as methods to force a mystical experience and if, in addition, elaborate outer and inner mysteries are created to form an elitist mystical club, then mysticism in my opinion loses its essence and also becomes more like a cult.

As a direct experience of the transcendental power we call God, mysticism should be the most rewarding result of our spiritual quest and the highest attainment of human spirituality. It seems that certain people, also due to cultural preferences, will employ one or more of these techniques to still the mind and our critical rational sensors, which normally will help us to discern

between impulses of value and nonsense. Due to the fact that spirituality seems to operate from a basis of love and compassion and is rather hindered by our instrumental rationality, these techniques are helpful. But then again, if the practice of these instruments makes us less human and takes over our psyche, I personally have serious doubts whether they are then helpful tools of spirituality; then it seems to function rather like psychological lightning arrestors. Not knowing enough about this complex subject, I will rather take my clues from spiritual heroes such as Buddha and Jesus. Although it seems that they employed different strategies, and perhaps combinations of strategies, they presumably did not normally favour trance or ecstatic practices. It is obvious, however, that they had a special and direct relationship with the Ultimate Spirit.

5. CRITIQUE OF PRESENT DAY CHRISTIANITY AS INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICITY

In the light of the variety of messianic and apocalyptic expectations that existed at the time of Jesus' birth it was inevitable that any special or gifted person should attract religious attention. Under Roman law, Greek cultural dominance, and a less than godly temple cult the Jews were certain something had to happen to change this hopeless national and religious situation. As in the time of the Babylonian exile, history and religion needed reinterpretation to make sense of the covenant and their religion in general. Eastern and Western schools of philosophy as well as a variety of mystery religions competed for the attention of the more literate population of the Empire, while the less fortunate masses of Israel longed for the glory of a "new" Davidic kingdom. The only hope of the destitute was for the "final act of the end times" when the Saviour from God would liberate them from human suffering and "God's rule" will start.

In this scenario, the wise, compassionate and extraordinary spirituality of Jesus made him very special amongst his fellow men. His loving interest in all people, and especially the disadvantaged, coupled with a keen intellect and

profound spiritual insight soon made him a respected teacher as well as a social and religious philosopher to be reckoned with. He attracted a sizeable following and his method of teaching through parables and discussions made the messages accessible to a wide spectrum of the population. They could relate to the stories and digest them according to current knowledge, insight and spiritual maturity, while the learned were confronted directly with a keen sense of their prejudices, biases and intentions.

His special gifts soon earned him a very broad spectrum of identification labels, ranging from lunatic and devil-possessed to brilliant philosopher and divine saviour. Most labels correspond to some expectation based on some tradition, not to mention the new composite roles and identities that were later awarded to him in retrospection after the Scriptures were again “thoroughly searched” for meaningful clues to his real identity. Fresh and new revelations also played a role after his death. Remembering Apollonius’ comment that all good men were honoured with the title of God or son of God, these titles were also used for Jesus. To uncover the “real” Jesus is a very difficult task, even bordering on the impossible due to the religious and sometimes superstitious interpretations of the history and meaning of important people’s lives, as was common in that era. In addition to the proliferation of oral traditions, about eighty gospels and many more imaginative, interpretative writings about Jesus were in circulation. These writings represent group and community evaluations of Jesus and his mission and covered the whole spectrum of prophet and philosopher to “divine” Messiah. Unfortunately the early Church, from the third century onwards, decided to limit the scriptures to those that best represent their view and the others were banned and systematically but thoroughly destroyed.

As we have noticed, the diversity in Judaism resulted in many messianic and apocalyptic expectations but this is not the end of the story. The extraordinary life and extraordinary person soon became clothed in other cultural roles representing the variety of the cosmopolitan Mediterranean provinces. The ideal of the Greek hero and the dying and resurrected Godmen of the Mysteries acquired a new, real and creditable role model. The older models

were legendary and mythical and their stories outdated. Some of these myths were even in Plato's time regarded as patently unhealthy for the children because they were not able to understand their inner meanings. The philosophers in general wanted to teach and discuss the meanings hidden in the myths on a rational and direct basis as Socrates did, but this method required certain skills and knowledge, and was therefore not so suitable for the uneducated masses.

What and who Jesus "really was" became virtually irrelevant for the different groups that used him as their icon or incorporated him in their religious philosophical constructs. Even the followers of Jesus within Judaism had different opinions about him and very soon after his death gentile groups incorporated him in their stories and belief structures so that even Paul, who produced the first known Christian writings, encountered and took over a fully fledged Syrian "Christian creed" or tradition. This was definitely not the same as the Judaic version of the Jerusalem followers of Jesus, led not by Peter but by James the brother of Jesus. He was also known as "James the Just" and very much respected in the Jewish community at large for his piousness.

It is now accepted that the early Jerusalem followers of Jesus were a type of Pharisaic sect within the broad stream of Judaism and were welcome in the synagogues until late in the first century. It stands to reason that his Jewish followers, who were extreme monotheists in contrast with some pagan groups, could not regard Jesus as divine. The divinity of Jesus could only be part of the much later debate of equality within the Trinity and the growing insistence of the flourishing gentile Church that Jesus is just as important as the Father is. I am convinced that groups that used the Jesus saga as a fresh and superbly fitting new legend for application in a novel Jesus Mystery movement ascribed these divine roles to him. That there existed such innovative, religious groups using Jesus as a gnostic Revealer or as the universal Hero in Mysteries is now certain through the recovery at Nag Hammadi of their writings, which were also mentioned by the early Church Fathers. The evidence now clearly shows that variety and not orthodoxy was the reality in the first centuries after the death of Jesus. Furthermore, it is also agreed that the early Christian groups

were perceived as a form of mystery religion. In fact, some groups would not even have any option but to operate in total secrecy because of safety considerations at various times and in various places. It would furthermore also be impossible for Paul to gain any converts if he did not use the known metaphors and religious concepts of his prospects, to convince them of his superior Mystery, tailor-made for their pagan needs. Many problems also arose from taking metaphor and legend as literal history and facts, especially in the resurrection lore.

History is normally written by the victor and unfortunately the post Constantine Church made it their business to destroy everything concerned with opposition thought, even scientific books. We therefore owe it to ourselves to try to uncover the real history as far as it may be possible. This should at least bring more modesty, consideration and respect for different opinions and interpretations about Jesus' nature and role, tempering the arrogance and bullying tactics of stronger parties.

Certain "Christians" conceptualized Jesus as divine, co-equal to Jehovah, or even as God himself incarnated; this type of deification could not come from Jewish messianic expectations, but from a variety of gentile and pagan religious inputs outside Judaism. Paul would not dare to preach his "Cosmic Christ" in the Synagogue - and why would he? These concepts were needed to reach his pagan converts and did he not specifically see his mission as a gentile one and asked for special leniency from the "Pillars" in Jerusalem? Furthermore, there were specific and practical advantages from using the two tier-teaching model of the Mysteries in heterogenic, unsafe circumstances as was proved by the many gnostic groups and many Churches in certain provinces also adopted this methodology.

Because of the general ignorance about the other spiritual orientations related to Jesus we need at least to know more about the variety and complexity of beliefs that is contained in the Bible; who wrote the different books, for what reasons and when, as well as to discern the major characteristics of their theology. Why was the specific selection made and when, as well as why

were the books presented in the order that we came to know. It is outright sad that modern day Christians must learn, mostly after intense dissatisfaction with the quality of spirituality displayed by Christian societies, and then only from the other social sciences and Biblical scientists, that "Christian Church history" is coming down as one of the most subjective and connived stories ever dished up as holy history. The question now is, did our religious leaders know the real facts or not? Do they still believe the nearly "divine succession of truth and scripture" from Jesus through Peter to the Church, on to this day? Do they intend to do the right thing and revise these gross misrepresentations? I sincerely hope they will or else the independent scholars will keep on doing it for them and they and the church will surely reap the sad results of their neglect or, worse, their misleading silence.

I am indebted to the excellent summary of Burton Mack's book "Who Wrote the Bible", which I studied however, I cannot improve on Dennis Duling's summery, as taken off the Internet, wrote as a commentary. Duling says in this engaging summery that Burton Mack takes his earlier studies of wisdom in his books "A Myth of Innocence" (1988) and "The Lost Gospel" (1993) and transforms them into a pungent, critical, sophisticated and social-historical introduction to the New Testament. He begins with the historical background, closes with the early church fathers and frames the whole with postmodernist reflections about the mystique of the Bible in America.

"In his Prologue, 'The Mystique of Sacred Scripture', Mack discusses the 'strange authority granted to the Bible in our society', 'together with the poverty of our knowledge and public discussion...' of it. Mack says that there is a catch-22 situation: the canonical New Testament is 'taken as proof for the conventional picture of Christian origins, and the conventional picture is taken as proof for the way in which the New Testament was written.' We would have to dismantle the conventional picture created by 'centrist' Christians from the second to the fourth centuries C.E. and, by analysing each individual writing, reconstruct a more plausible scenario based on social history. The result is that the Christian form of the Bible becomes transparent as 'the myth of origin for the Christian religion'. Indeed, it is the 'epic that determines the

Bible's hold upon our American mind'. Is that hold legitimate? Mack drops a hint: 'At the end of the book... we will have to wonder aloud about the continuing value of the Bible's guidance as we chart our global futures. And the final question will be whether, given our moment in a post-modern world, we can continue our acrobatics on the Bible's high wire without losing our balance.'

"Galilee was a historically independent region where the meeting of Jewish and Greek culture provided an ideal place for a counter-cultural Jewish intellectual's social experiment. Remnants of 'Jewish' culture persisted in Matthean and Ebionite texts; remnants of Greek culture persisted in Q1 and Thomas, but the ultimate synthesis was the New Testament of an institutional church infatuated with Roman power.

"'Teachings from the Jesus Movements' concentrates on the earliest period after Jesus' death. It explores five complexes of teaching material, each complex functioning as a foundation myth for a Jesus movement or school. The first complex consists of the Sayings Gospel of the Q community. Its earliest form (Q1) contained once humorous aphoristic wisdom, that is, the teaching of Jesus, a Cynic-like Jewish intellectual who had a counter-cultural social vision (a non-apocalyptic, non-otherworldly, non-materialistic "Kingdom of God") and a counter-cultural lifestyle (voluntary poverty, breaking family ties, and the like), resembling Cynic teachings and lifestyle. This layer was then transformed by apocalyptic-prophetic ideas (Q2) and after 70 CE by a more sedate narrative Christian tradition (Q3). The second complex consists of the pre-Markan anecdotes of the Jesus School, that is, Cynic-like chreiai pitting Jesus against the Pharisees, which were expanded in Mark. The third complex is the Gospel of Thomas of the 'True Disciples,' a group that gnosticized Jesus' wisdom. The fourth complex consists of the pre-Markan miracle catenae (Achteimeier) of the 'Congregation of Israel,' a group that viewed Jesus in the same light as the miracle workers Moses and Elijah, a new healer for a new, inclusive, but marginal Israel. The last complex represents a short-lived, conservative, purity-conscious, perhaps politically

minded group, namely, the 'Jerusalem Pillars.' Each of the five groups was a social experiment; each saw itself as the people of Israel.

"Fragments from the Christ Cult' shifts to pre-Pauline confessions, hymns, and doxologies that illustrate the transformation of a Jesus movement into a Graeco-Roman mystery cult. These fragments celebrated Jesus' death, resurrection, and divine, spiritual presence, originally at Christian meals. The Christ myth echoed the persecuted, martyred righteous one and the rescue of imprisoned Wisdom. The Christ hymns added themes from the royal romance (the ruler who appears as a god) and the descent and ascent of the gods, resulting in the incarnation of the cosmic lord of the universe.

"Mack stresses that Paul, situated between the apocalyptic and the Gnostic, turned the Christ myth into a proclamation that laid claim to the Abrahamic covenant yet allowed Gentiles freedom from circumcision and the law. Paul tamed the Greek concept of the Spirit and developed the Christ myth into a theology of God's righteousness for all. In 'The Gospel of Jesus the Christ', 'Mark' combined Jesus movement traditions with the Christ myth, to refocus on the suffering righteous one. 'Matthew' (13:52) stressed keeping old (reinterpreted) and new commandments. 'Luke' - about 120 CE - developed a grand history of salvation linking Jesus to the bishops via the apostles. In 'Visions of the Cosmic Lord' the Signs are used to trace the social history of the Johannine community; they were then linked with discourses about Jesus' self-identity and descent/ascent. The deuterio-Pauline Colossians and Ephesians made the Christ myth into a rather dull, cosmic-man myth in the context of an assimilated household community. Hebrews, saved by some Paulinist, transformed the myth into a not very popular, theologically offensive philosophical exhortation about the heavenly high priest. Revelation transformed it into a 'ghastly vision' containing descriptions that 'would put Hieronymus Bosch to shame,' says Mack. (Duling 1997:2)

"Finally, in 'Letters from the Apostles', he argues that from 90 to 140 CE the Pastorals and Catholic Epistles, James, and the Johannine Letters sought to develop an intellectual, institutional 'centrist' position that included the claim

to apostolic authority for, and obedience to, overseers. 'The fiction is obvious in all of these letters and the circularity of the preachment ridiculous.' With respect to the Petrine myth, for example, "there is not a shred of historical evidence to support it.

"Part III, 'History and the Christian Myth', carries forward the notion of centrists' 'apostolic myth' in three chapters. In 'Inventing Apostolic Traditions' Mack describes 'the fiction of the twelve disciples who became apostles' as a foundation for the emerging office of bishop. Clement developed the monarchical episcopate. The Didache provided 'the kind of instructional literature written by overseers and eventually attributed to the apostles.' Of Ignatius's desire for mimetic martyrdom, Mack says: 'It is a shock to think that the Christ myth had lost its social logic so completely within the span of half a century and that it was now available for such a personal internalisation.' The author of Acts (again 120 CE) used Hellenistic literary conventions to create its fictional epic, an apostolic age of apostle-martyrs who imitated a Messiah killed by his own people. Acts reduced faith in Christ Jesus to a 'creedal religion'. 'Claiming Israel's Epic' moves to those who fought over the myth on the intellectual battlefield. At Rome Marcion's anti-Judaism and Valentinus's Gnosticism challenged the bishops, but Justin cleverly found in the logos spermatikos a way to defend the myth against insiders and outsiders, though he was reduced to 'boring and disgusting' arguments against the Jews. 'Creating the Christian Bible' traces the development of the Christian canon down to Athanasius and Jerome. It is not the story of 'what belongs,' but... 'of fiercely fought cultural conquest'. 'The Bible was created when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire.' The result says Mack, is an epic that begins with creation, covers all of human history, and will end with apocalyptic destruction - in what is elsewhere called salvation history, with Christ as its pivot.

"In his Epilogue, 'The Fascination of the Bible,' Mack argues that the Biblical epic has been used as a basis for Western Christian cultural imperialism, resulting in the 'mental gymnastics' of converted peoples attempting to fit their own cultural histories into the Bible's universal salvation historical plan.

When they use the Bible as a set of oracles to solve problems they buy into the Christian culture. Mack comments: 'the Bible is the product and property of a sub-cultural social institution.' As an 'otherworldly script' for Christian ritual it shapes values: the 'old' and the 'new' can lead to anti-Semitism, as well as to the mentality that all non-Christians are pre-Christian, to the implicit claim to have a corner on the truth and to the justification of war on Christianity's enemies. Even America's secular mythologies draw power from the Biblical epic. Only now in our postmodern multicultural context does one dare to raise questions about this 'questionable myth'. Mack concludes with the hope that his book will help promote public discussion of religion, culture, and the place of the Bible in it." (Duling 1997:2)

Duling says (1997:3), "some scholars will think that Mack goes too far in building an edifice on Q1/Thomas wisdom, or in shifting from the apocalyptic prophet to the Cynic type sage, or in linking particular literary complexes with particular groups. Some will think that his historical reconstruction is too subjective and his view of institution building too subversive. On the other side, postmodernist literary critics will probably think that his portrayal of early church history is too indebted to the classical modernist paradigm."

We need to understand that the selected books that constitute our Bible originated from approximately 25 years after Jesus' death and started with the letters of Paul. Then followed the gospel of Mark as basis for Mathew and Luke, all written after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. The gospel of John was only written at the beginning of the next century with some of the "apostolic", letters written in the latter half of the first century, and some even in the second century, by unknown people and not by the "official" authors attributed to them... The "facts" in the Bible differ from gospel to gospel if you read them parallel, as well as with secular history. Jesus' birth date and date of his death cannot even be fixed historically to a specific year from the Bible and it now looks as if that reference point for our Western calendar could be a couple of years out.

We should further remember that the Bible was written in a pre-scientific era for spiritual and religious reasons and each book represents the current view of a specific person with his own theology and to convince his followers of his point of view. It is a specific compilation of writings by religious people who witness their religious experiences with God, by interpreting it as God's revelation to them. Therefore, what they feel and think about God and Jesus is very personal, private and subjective but based on their evaluation of their own religious milieu and experiences. The resultant effort of the "orthodox" group to classify and merge these individual theologies into one metanarrative could only work with many speculative and vague theological concepts and with a good deal of coercion. In order to re-assess the world and life of Jesus we need to have a broader perspective and not allow special interests to add to already existing biases.

6. JESUS OF NAZARETH

In order to get an idea of the true spirituality of Jesus we will have to examine the multiple identities given to him by different categories of followers in time against the "authentic traditional" one the post Constantine Church claims as official.

It seems that the Jewishness of the Jesus sect is deliberately kept from ordinary Christians and that they are totally ignorant of the fact that the early followers of Jesus were not "Christians", as we now understand the term. Divine status co-equal with God was totally out of the question in a Jewish setup where Jesus could be seen only as a special prophet or a type of Messiah. The gospels have no sense yet that Jesus was anything other than a Jew with his own brand of Jewish theology. The gospels do not even have a sense that he came to found a new religion, an idea completely foreign to all the gospel texts. However, there are definitely other philosophical and mystical insights coming from Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus was a special person, a type of social-religious activist, and to put him into some or other specific pigeon hole is a mistake and does not do justice to the complexity of

the evidence that is now available, especially when the gnostic literature are included in the picture.

There is, however, reason to believe, says Attridge, that some of the prophetic statements attributed to Jesus probably were creations of the early church and attributed to him in order to help his followers to understand their relationship with their own history and the catastrophes, which were developing during the course of the first century. If we look at some of the other elements in the teachings of Jesus, there seems to be a critical stance towards some of these prophetic elements (especially in the Gospel of Thomas). So for instance, there are sayings where Jesus says that nobody know when the end will come. In addition, if we look at the way in which he uses some symbols that are connected with these hopes for eschatological intervention then we seem to see Jesus using them in odd ways. Ways that suggest he may have been critical of some of those eschatological hopes. So it is Attridge's (2001:1) understanding, and shared by Crossan, as we will see later, that Jesus probably grew up in an environment where some people nurtured these hopes for divine intervention into human history. He may have shared them at some point in his life, if indeed he was a disciple of John the Baptist and was baptized by him. Moreover, if John the Baptist was such an apocalyptic preacher it is entirely reasonable to presume that Jesus had some connection with those eschatological hopes. However, the way in which he worked them out and came to understand the reign of God or the kingdom of God suggests that he did not buy totally into the eschatological vision that became reworked by his followers into such passages as Mark 13.

Jesus and John the Baptist had a complex relationship, and John Dominic Crossan (1994:46) has, to my mind, a plausible explanation. He says the fact that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist is as certain as anything historians can know about Jesus. "It is somewhat clouded, however, in our present texts by the fact that later followers of Jesus thought it was not appropriate that the Messiah should be baptized and therefore, apparently, be inferior to John the Baptist. Jesus was baptized by John and therefore he had to accept John's message, at least when he was being baptized. Whether and when he changed

his understanding is another question.” But he accepts it when he was being baptized, and John’s message is: “God, very soon, imminently, any moment, is going to descend to eradicate the evil of this world in a sort of an apocalyptic consummation....”

“One of the earliest statements we have is a statement by Jesus that John was the greatest person ever born on earth, but that the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John. Now, this is a marvellously ambiguous statement. The first half lauds John to the heavens; the second puts him as the least person in the Kingdom”, that means exactly what Crossan (2002:1) says he would expect. It means Jesus is changing his vision of God and the Kingdom of God from what he has taken from John. He is not really denigrating John, but he is saying the Kingdom of God is not exactly what John was teaching.

“If we look at the fully developed doctrine of Millennialism that was consequently developed one is annoyed by the seemingly unnecessary complexity of the process and can recognise many Mediterranean imports.” Crossan (2002:2), believes that this elaborate, abstract process was not the interest of Jesus. There is another type of eschatology and he thinks that is what Jesus was more interested in. He calls it ethical eschatology. That is the demand that God is making on us. Not us on God, but God on us, we must do something about the evil in this world. In an apocalypse, as it were, we are waiting for God. In an ethical eschatology, God is waiting for us. That is, he thinks, what Jesus is talking about in the Kingdom of God. It demands that we should do something in conjunction with God. It is the Kingdom of God, but it is His Kingdom for the here and now.

For the sake of politeness I will not say what I think of the “seven point theological plan” of the so-called doctrine of Millennialism, ascribed to God as his plans for the future, which is set out in the section on Judaism; what I will say is that I agree with Crossan, Fredriksen and Attridge that it was not Jesus’ main interest at all. A compassionate and loving Jesus would have respected John’s and his contemporaries’ beliefs about this grand scheme and would have tried to persuade them from their present positions to a new

understanding of the Kingdom. It is also understandable that in conversations he would make use of the argument that the kingdom “has come near”, meaning that the generally expected, future kingdom is nearer than they think, and of a different kind. If he could then get their attention or interest, and provided they have reached the required spiritual maturity he would, and then only, explain his concept to them, which is that the kingdom of God is within us, and that we should manifest it here and now.

According to Pelikan (1997:1), “the oscillation between describing the role of Rabbi to Jesus and attributing to him a new and unique authority made additional titles necessary. One such was Prophet, as in the acclamation on Palm Sunday (Matt. 21: 11). ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.’ Probably the most intriguing version of it is once again in Aramaic (Rev. 3: 14): ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness.’ The conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount confirms the special status of Jesus as not only Rabbi but Prophet (Matt. 7: 28 – 8: 1): ‘And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.’ The New Testament does not attribute the power of performing miracles only to Jesus and his followers (Matt. 12: 27), but it does cite the miracles as substantiation of his standing as Rabbi-Prophet.

“Rabbi and Prophet yielded to two other categories, each of them likewise expressed in an Aramaic word and then in its Greek translation; the Aramaic form of ‘Messiah,’ translated into Greek as *ho Christos*, ‘Christ,’ the Anointed One (John 1: 41; 4: 25); and Marana, ‘our Lord,’ in the liturgical formula Maranatha, ‘Our Lord, come!’ translated into Greek as *ho Kyrios* (1 Cor. 16: 22). The future belonged to these titles and to the identification of him as the Son of God and second person of the Trinity. But in the process of establishing themselves the titles Christ and Lord, as well as even Rabbi and Prophet, often lost much of their Semitic content, says Pelikan. To the Christian disciples of the first century the conception of Jesus as Rabbi was self-evident, to the Christian disciples of the second century it was embarrassing, to the Christian disciples of the third century and beyond it was

obscure. The beginnings of this de-Judaization of Christianity are visible already within the New Testament. With Paul's decision to 'turn to the Gentiles' (Acts 13: 46) after having begun his preaching in the synagogues, and then with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the Christian movement increasingly became Gentile rather than Jewish in its constituency and outlook. In that setting the Jewish elements of the life of Jesus had to be explained to Gentile readers (for example, John 2:6). The Acts of the Apostles can be read as a tale of two cities: its first chapter, with Jesus and his disciples after the resurrection, is set in Jerusalem; but the last chapter reaches its climax with the final voyage of the apostle Paul, in the simple but pulse-quickenning sentence 'And so we came to Rome.'" (Pelikan 1997:2)

Crossan says (2001:2) that Jesus talks quite clearly about the Kingdom of God, and there's no hesitation about it. And that means this is the will of God. Jesus is making statements about what God wants for the earth. And there is no "The word of the Lord came to me," or there's no "I've thought about this." It seems self-evident; Crossan says that he thinks that's exactly what it was for Jesus. "The Kingdom of God is radically subversive of the Kingdom of Caesar and that is obvious to Jesus because he had grown up, as it were, at the bottom of the heap and he knows the heap is unjust. It is so obvious to him that it is beyond revelation.... It is coming straight out of the Jewish tradition that this system is not right. Now, of course, his followers are going to ask him a very obvious question: 'Who are you?'" And Crossan says he finds no problem that during the life of Jesus certain of his followers could have said: "He is divine." And by divine, meaning, "This is where we see God at work. This is the way we see God", or, "He is the Messiah." "But then, they'll have to interpret the Messiah in the light of what Jesus is doing. He doesn't seem to be a militant Messiah, or maybe they would like him to be a militant Messiah. All of those options could have been there during the life of Jesus. We have no evidence whatsoever that Jesus was in the least bit concerned with accepting any of them, or even discussing any of them. He was the one who announced the Kingdom of God." (Crossan 2002:2)

About Jesus' relationship with God, Crossan (2001:3) says he does not think that Jesus thought he had any special relationship with God that was not there for anyone else who would look at the world and see that this was not right. "It was to Jesus so obvious that anyone should be able to see it. Now, on the other hand, most people weren't able to see that in the first century. Or in the twentieth. So in that sense, yes, it is a unique relationship. And it is on that which later theology would build, of course."

According to Loader (2000:1) the most worn piece of the Jesus puzzle reflects Christian preoccupations with titles of authority. "Of the Messiah there are a few and these are so ambiguous that the most we might dare to say is that if Jesus saw himself in this light he left history to define its connotation, so that during his ministry it could have had only a chameleon-like quality, corresponding to the myriads of interpretations as we have seen. It seems strange that what seems incidental soon became the symbolic focus of Jewish Christian faith and usurped the kingdom of God as the dominant motive of their preaching. One dark piece of the puzzle seems to fit in two different directions: Son of Man. It sits quite well with the imagery of future hope as one of a few strands of speculation expounding the great vision of Daniel 7. Others see in it a self-designation of some anonymity. Certainly the pieces do not constitute an image of a pre-existent Revealer such as appears in John's model of the heavenly envoy and formed the basis for the church's great Christological constructions of later centuries. The presence of God is more to be found in events and encounters than in self claims, but the former certainly gave rise in time to seeing the whole as a divine encounter.

"The later image of a Jesus coming to die for our sins has very few pieces on the table of the historical puzzle, however aptly it may interpret his death in retrospect." (Loader 2000:2). "Yet the last days complete an image not of deluded visionary or failed reformer, but of one who confronted systems of power to the point of ultimate vulnerability. The result is an enigma that some find revelatory and others find pathetic or tragic. It is a matter of debate whether the colourful resurrection and appearance pieces belong in the puzzle or constitute their own secondary puzzle. Their story is about the disciples'

perceptions, perhaps more so than about an empty tomb which may be more of a deduction than a reality.”

Precisely because the person and teachings of Jesus seem to be such a veritable puzzle for theologians and manifesting in such a kaleidoscope of spiritual groups just after his death I prefer Crossan’s method of inquiry, which takes a broader view and includes other disciplines and all written evidence in the search for the historical Jesus. We need to look for all other voices in the past to compensate for the official version’s dominance over time. As Solomon says, in the multiplicity of advisors will wisdom be discovered?

In John Dominic Crossan’s (1994) “Jesus a Revolutionary biography”, which I will use at this stage as my basis for argumentation, he starts off by quoting Morton Smith, from his book “Jesus the Magician”. “Admittedly, history is more complex than physics; the lines connecting the original figure to the developed legends cannot be traced with mathematical accuracy; the intervention of unknown factors has to be allowed for. Consequently, results can never claim more than probability; but ‘probability,’ as Bishop Butler said, ‘is the very guide of life.’ ”(Crossan 1994:ix)

“If you read the four gospels vertically and consecutively, from start to finish and one after the other, you get a generally persuasive impression of unity, harmony, and agreement. But if you read them horizontally and comparatively, focusing on this or that unit and comparing it across two, three, or four versions, it is disagreement rather than agreement that strikes you most forcibly. And those divergences stem not from the random vagaries of memory and recall but from the coherent and consistent theologies of the individual texts. The gospels are, in other words, interpretations.” (Crossan (1994:x). Hence, of course, despite there being only one Jesus, there can be more than one gospel, and more than one interpretation.

That core problem is compounded by another one, says Crossan (1994:xi). “Those four gospels do not represent all the early gospels available or even a

random sample within them but are instead a calculated collection known as the canonical gospels. This becomes clear in studying other gospels either discerned as sources inside the official four or else discovered as documents outside them.

“Suppose that in such a situation you wanted to know not just what early believers wrote about Jesus but what you would have seen and heard if you had been a more or less neutral observer in the early decades of the first century. Clearly, some people ignored him, some worshipped him, and others crucified him. But what if you wanted to move behind the screen of creedal interpretation and, without in any way denying or negating the validity of faith, give an accurate but impartial account of the historical Jesus as distinct from the confessional Christ? That is what the academic or scholarly study of the historical Jesus is about, at least when it is not a disguise for doing theology and calling it history, doing autobiography and calling it biography, doing Christian apologetics and calling it academic scholarship. Put another way, no matter how fascinating result and conclusion may be, they are only as good as the theory and method on which they are based.” (Crossan 1994: xi)

Faced with all those laminated layers of development and interpretation Crossan, follows two basic strategies to base his reconstruction on the most plausibly original material. He focuses especially on the earliest stratum of the tradition, on materials he dates to the period between 30 and 60 C.E. And, he never builds on anything that has only a single independent attestation. “All professional journalists operate by that standard, and critical historians should follow their good example.” A single attestation may of course be quite accurate, but he tries to build his picture upward from the most multiple toward that single one. Multiple, or at least plural independent attestations, in the primary stratum point to the earliest available material. That is a methodological discipline, a process that may not guarantee truth but at least makes dishonesty more difficult. Crossan’s (1994:xiii) His attitude and approach to his quest is summed up as follows: “My endeavour was to reconstruct the historical Jesus as accurately and honestly as possible. It was

not my purpose to find a Jesus whom I liked or disliked, a Jesus with whom I agreed or disagreed.”

6.1 Jesus and the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is what the world would be if God were directly and immediately in charge. For Philo, therefore, the wise and the virtuous already partake in the kingdom or kingship of God and only political dominions with laws modelled on God's are worthy even of the title of kingdom.

The second example is also a Jewish work, says Crossan, the “Wisdom of Solomon”, written, most likely, during the reign of the emperor Caligula, between 37 and 41 C.E. “The true and lasting rule is not that which the kings of the earth now exercise but that which they would receive if they submitted themselves to Wisdom's own rule. They are kings without the real kingdom. The biblical Jacob, on the other hand, possessed the true kingdom, although he was not a king, in 10:10.

When a righteous man fled from his brother's wrath,
she [Wisdom] guided him on straight paths;
she showed him the kingdom of God.

“The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Wisdom eternally present – available, on the one hand, to anyone who heeds her call, and transcendent, on the other hand, to all the evil rulers of the world.

“The third example is from the ‘Sentences of Sextus’ 307-311, a pagan work, probably from the second century, with later Christian adaptations, whose moral teaching is intensely ascetic and highly concerned with sexuality.

A wise man presents God to humanity.
Of all his works God is most proud of a sage.
Next to God, nothing is as free as a wise man.
Whatever God possesses belongs also to the sage.
A wise man shares in the kingdom of God.

“Thus, even for a pagan sage, let alone a Jewish or a Christian one, an ethical or sapiential Kingdom of God was as clear a possibility as an apocalyptic one.” (Crossan 1994:58)

“These three examples all imagine a present Kingdom of God that wise, just, and virtuous sages – that is, the precise class to which all three writers belonged – could enter into here and now. What would a present or sapiential Kingdom of God, a life-style under God’s direct dominion, look like to peasants, and especially to a peasant talking to peasants? It is in this position that Crossan is locating Jesus. He was most probably an illiterate peasant, but with an oral brilliance that few of those trained in literate and scribal disciplines can ever attain. When today we read his words in fixed and frozen texts we must recognize that the oral memory of this first audiences could have retained, at best, only the striking image, the startling analogy, the forceful conjunction and, for example, the plot summary of a parable that might have taken an hour or more to tell and perform.

“Jesus did not simply eat together with whoever was seeking spiritual guidance. It is not a matter of simple table fellowship, but is what anthropologists call commensality - from mensa, the Latin word for ‘table’. It means the rules of tabling and eating as miniature models for the rules of association and socialization. It means table fellowship as a map of economic discrimination, social hierarchy, and political differentiation. What Jesus’ parable advocates, therefore, is an open commensality, an eating together without using table as a miniature map of society’s vertical discriminations and lateral separations. The social challenge of such equal or egalitarian commensality is the parable’s most fundamental danger and most radical threat. In terms of the original situation, therefore, Jesus’ action puts him on a direct collision course with priestly authority in the Temple. After touching a leper he can hardly turn around and tell him to observe the purity code that he himself has just broken. This is not, by the way, a case of divine law against human law, compassion against legalism, gospel against law, let alone Christianity against Judaism. It is more likely a case within Judaism of Galilean peasants against Jerusalem priests.” (Crossan, 1994:58)

There are three layers in the Gospels, according to Crossan (1994:83): “the original, transmissional, and redactional. They are constantly laminated within the gospels, but this is a classic case of all three rather clearly visible within a single text. Yet no amount of theological apologetics at the second level or even their undoing at the third level can ever obliterate the first or original level in which Jesus heals by refusing to accept traditional and official sanctions against the diseased person. Jesus heals him, in other words, by taking him into a community of the marginalized and disenfranchised – into, in fact, the Kingdom of God.”

“Did Jesus have any type of organised social program for others to adopt and follow? We know already that he had a magnificent vision of the Kingdom of God here on earth and that by his own actions he already practiced what he preached. But were others only on the receiving end of that vision and program, or were they somehow empowered into it as active protagonists and not just passive recipients?” Even as he asks that question Crossan (1994:92) expects a positive answer, and for one major reason. “Mediterranean groupism would dictate some grouping around Jesus if his attack on familial, political and religious communities were to make sense to his audience. What is the replacement for such communities? We saw, for example, that John the Baptist was organizing a discrete but united community of the baptized across the Jewish homeland, waiting for the advent of the apocalyptic God. What was Jesus doing at the group level, but with a very different message from a very different God?”

What Jesus called the Kingdom of God must be taken as radical messages that he taught and acted, theorized and performed against social oppression, cultural materialism and imperial domination in the first and second centuries. Crossan (1994:93) wants to emphasise as strongly as possible that Jesus was not just a teacher or a preacher in purely intellectual terms, not just part of the history of ideas. “He not only discussed the Kingdom of God; he enacted it and said others could do so as well. If all he had done were to talk about the Kingdom, Lower Galilee would probably have greeted him with a great big

peasant yawn. But you cannot ignore the healings and the exorcisms, especially in their socially subversive function. You cannot ignore the pointedly political overtones of the very term Kingdom of God itself. It is, unfortunately, one of the abiding temptations of pastors and scholars to reduce Jesus to words alone, to replace a lived life with a preached sermon or an interesting idea. To remove, however, that which is radically subversive, socially revolutionary, and politically dangerous from Jesus' actions is to leave his life meaningless and his death inexplicable."

6.2 A Critical look at Important Moments in the Life of Jesus

"The 'Triumphal Entrance' of Mark 11:1-10 is based on a prophecy from the fourth or third century B.C.E. now included in Zachariah 9:9." Crossan (1994:129) furthermore, draws attention to the fact that this prophecy is not based on general Davidic or Mosaic models known to every Jew but on a very precise verse in one single prophecy, which is atypical to the general Messianic expectancies. It is rather looking back to find a verse to explain what happened.

"As to the Last Supper described in Mark 14:22-25, Jesus celebrates the Passover Eve meal with his disciples and prophesies his impending death. This was a private incident and the question is whether it was historical. Did he institute a new Passover meal in which his martyrdom with its separation of body and blood was symbolized by the meal with its separation of bread and wine? On the one hand, Paul certainly knows about such an institution in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. But, on the other hand, John 13-17 has a last supper with Jesus and his disciples that is neither the Passover meal nor any type of institutionalized symbolic commemoration of his death. Neither the Gospel of Thomas nor the Q Gospel exhibits any awareness of a Last Supper tradition. Finally, the case of Didache 9-10 is especially significant. It describes a communal and ritual eating together, from the second half of the first century, with absolutely no hint of Passover meal, Last Supper, or passion symbolism built into its origins or development. I cannot believe that those specific Christians knew all about those elements and yet studiously avoided them. I

can only presume that those elements were not there for everyone from the beginning – that is, from solemn, formal and final institution by Jesus himself. It spread to other Christian groups only slowly. It cannot be used as a historical event to explain anything about Jesus' own death.

“Finally, there is the Temple Cleansing, a most unfortunate term for what was actually a symbolic destruction of the Temple. Here we are on much more solid historical ground, because there are three independent sources for this incident. The first version is in the Gospel of Thomas 71, but it contains only a saying without any action, a word without an accompanying deed: Jesus said, ‘I shall [destroy this] house, and no one will be able to build it’. That is to say, I shall utterly destroy this house. For the Temple as (God’s) house, consider these verses from the Jewish Sibylline Oracles 4:8-11, of around 100 C.E.:

For [the great God] does not have a house, a stone set up as a temple,
dumb and toothless, a bane which brings many woes to men,
but one which it is not possible to see from earth nor to measure
with mortal eyes, since it was not fashioned by mortal hands.

“God’s house or Temple is not on earth but in heaven. And that use of house as in the Gospel of Thomas 71 shows up differently in the two other independent sources for this incident.” (Crossan 1994:131)

“Next comes the version in Mark 11:15-19, which is not at all a purification but rather a symbolic destruction. There is here, unlike in the preceding case, first a physical action and then an interpretative saying. First of all, and in general, there was absolutely nothing wrong with any of the buying, selling, or money-changing operations conducted in the outer courts of the Temple. Nobody was stealing or defrauding or contaminating the sacred precincts. Those activities were the absolutely necessary concomitants of the fiscal basis and sacrificial purpose of the Temple. Second, Mark himself knows that Jesus was not just purifying but symbolically destroying the Temple, because he carefully framed his action within the fruitless fig tree’s cursing in 11:12-14 and its withering in 11:20. As the useless fig tree was destroyed, so,

symbolically, was the useless Temple. He would not allow any one to carry anything through the temple:

And he taught, and said to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations' [= Isaiah 56:7]? But you have made it a den of robbers" [= Jeremiah 7:11].

"Notice, first of all, the balance of deed and word, action and comment. That action is not, of course, a physical destruction of the Temple, but it is a deliberate symbolical attack. It destroys the Temple by stopping its fiscal, sacrificial, and liturgical operations." Crossan (1994:131)

"Finally, there is the account in John 2:14-17. Again, I show the balance of deed and word. But notice that, despite the use of a different Old Testament text, the word house is still there. John has clearly developed the incident quite differently from Mark, just as he placed it at the start rather than the end of his description of Jesus' life. In John it is the authorities who are challenged to destroy Jesus' body as the symbolic Temple rather than Jesus himself who is symbolically destroying their Temple." Crossan (1994:132) He concludes that an action and sayings involving the Temple's symbolic destruction go back to the historical Jesus.

6.3 Searching the Scriptures

Crossan (1994:145) argues that "searching the Scriptures" created Jesus' infancy narratives as well as the details of his crucifixion. His proposal is that Jesus' first followers knew almost nothing about the details of his crucifixion, death, or burial. "What we now have in those detailed passion accounts is not history remembered but prophecy historicized." And it is necessary to be very clear on what he means here by prophecy. He does not mean texts, events, or persons that predicted or foreshadowed the future that projected themselves forward toward a distant fulfilment. He means such units sought out backward, as it were, sought out after the events of Jesus' life were already known and his followers declared that texts from the Hebrew Scriptures had

been written with him in mind. Prophecy, in this sense, is known after rather than before the fact.

He further distinguishes three stages in the development of the passion stories. "One is the historical passion – what actually happened to Jesus, what anyone present would have seen. That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be, since both Josephus and Tacitus, agree with the Christian accounts on at least that basic fact. Next comes the prophetic passion – the search by scribally learned followers from, in Lenski's stratification, the Retainer rather than the Peasant class, to find a basis or justification in the Hebrew Scriptures for such a shocking eventuality. How could God's Chosen One have been so treated, and if he had been so treated, could he still be God's Chosen One? Finally came the narrative passion – the placing of such prophetic fulfilments into a sequential narrative with its origins well hidden within a plausible historical framework." Crossan (1994:146) He then explains his theory and its necessity for the movement, which needs to understand Jesus' death; they need to understand their past, reclaim your present, and envisage your future. "There is no messianic or apocalyptic prophecy that explains what happened to Jesus in a reasonable way. You know what you are looking for to get a grip on these perplexing happenings in relation to the group's beliefs. You search for texts that show death not as end but as beginning, not as divine judgment but as divine plan, not as ultimate defeat but as postponed victory for Jesus. You are, therefore, especially looking for texts with a certain duality, a certain hint of two stages, two moments, two phases, or two levels."

6.4 A Summary, from Jesus to Christ

In his epilogue, Crossan (1994:194) says, is both summary and challenge. 'The summary looks backward and condenses the preceding discussion into a historical synthesis. The challenge of looking forward asks about the relationship between any and every historically reconstructed Jesus and any and every theologically accepted Christ. The twin sections that follow are therefore, respectively, historical summary and theological challenge.

“He comes as yet unknown into a hamlet of Lower Galilee. He is watched by the cold, hard eyes of peasants living long enough at subsistence level to know exactly where the line is drawn between poverty and destitution. He looks like a beggar, yet his eyes lack the proper cringe, his voice the proper whine, his walk the proper shuffle. He speaks about the rule of God and they listen as much from curiosity as anything else. They know all about rule and power, about kingdom and empire, but they know it in terms of tax and debt, malnutrition and sickness, agrarian oppression and demonic possession. What they really want to know, is what can this Kingdom of God do for a lame child, a blind parent, a demented soul screaming its tortured isolation among the graves that mark the village fringes? Jesus walks with them to the tombs and in the silence after he has exorcised the woman they brought him to see, the villagers listen once more, but now with curiosity giving way to cupidity, fear, and embarrassment. He is invited, as honour demands, to the home of the village leader. He goes, instead, to stay in the home of the dispossessed woman. Not quite proper, to be sure, but it would be unwise to censure an exorcist, to criticize a magician. The village could yet broker this power to its surroundings, could give this Kingdom of God a localization, a place to which others would come for healing, a centre with honour and patronage enough for all — even, maybe, for that dispossessed woman herself. But the next day he leaves them, and now they wonder aloud about a divine kingdom with no respect for proper protocols — a kingdom, as he had said, not just for the poor, like themselves, but for the destitute.

“Even Jesus himself had not always seen things that way.” (Crossan 1994:196)
 “Earlier he had received John’s baptism and accepted his message of God as the imminent apocalyptic judge. But the Jordan was not just water and to be baptized in it was to recapitulate the ancient and archetypal passage from imperial bondage to national freedom. Herod Antipas moved swiftly to execute John, there was no apocalyptic consummation and Jesus, finding his own voice, began to speak of God not as imminent apocalypse but as present healing. To those first followers from the peasant villages of Lower Galilee who asked how to repay his exorcisms and cures, he gave a simple answer —

simple, that is, to understand, but hard as death itself to undertake. You are healed healers, he said, so take the Kingdom to others, for I am not its patron and you are not its brokers. It is, was and always will be available to any who wants it. Dress as I do, like a beggar, but do not beg. Bring a miracle and request a table. Those you heal must accept you into their homes.

“That ecstatic vision and social program sought to rebuild a society upward from its grass roots, but on principles of religious and economic egalitarianism, with free healing brought directly to the peasant homes and free sharing of whatever they had in return. The deliberate conjunction of magic and meal, miracle and table, free compassion and open commensality, was a challenge launched not just on the level of Judaism’s strictest purity regulations, or even on that of the Mediterranean’s patriarchal combination of honour and shame, patronage and clientele, but at the most basic level of civilization’s eternal inclination to draw lines, invoke boundaries, establish hierarchies, and maintain discriminations. It did not invite a political revolution but envisaged a social one at the imagination’s most dangerous depths. No importance was given to distinctions of Gentile and Jew, female and male, slave and free, poor and rich. Those distinctions were hardly even attacked in theory; in practice, they were simply ignored.

“What would happen to Jesus was probably as predictable as what had happened already to John. Some form of religiopolitical execution could surely have been expected. What he was saying and doing was as unacceptable in the first century as it would be in the twentieth – there, here, or anywhere. Still, the exact sequence of the events at the end of his life lacks multiple independent accounts, and the death is surer in its connection to the life than it is in its connection to the preceding few days. It seems clear that Jesus, confronted possibly for the first and only time, with the Temple’s rich magnificence, symbolically destroyed its perfectly legitimate brokerage function in the name of the unbrokered Kingdom of God. Such an act, if performed in the volatile atmosphere of Passover, a feast that celebrated Jewish liberation from inaugural imperial oppression, would have been quite enough to entail crucifixion by religiopolitical agreement. And it is now

impossible for us to imagine the offhand brutality, anonymity and indifference with which a peasant nobody like Jesus would have been disposed of by Roman soldiers.” (Crossan 1994:196)

“What could not have been predicted and might not have been expected was that the end was not the end. Those who had originally experienced divine power through his vision and his example continued to do so after his death. In fact, even more so, because now this power was no longer confined by time or place. A prudently neutral Jewish historian reported at the end of the first century that “when Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.” And an arrogant Roman historian reported, at the start of the second century, that ‘Christus, the founder of the name [of Christian], had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilates, and the pernicious superstition was checked for the moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.’ Some of Jesus’ own followers, who had initially fled from the danger and horror of the crucifixion, talked eventually not just of continued affection or spreading superstition but of resurrection.” (Crossan 1994:197).

Jesus had been interpreted in Crossan’s book (1994:198) against an earlier moment in Judaism’s encounter with Graeco-Roman imperialism. “It is not, however, the elite, literary, and sophisticated intellectual encounter of a Philo of Alexandria; it is, rather, that of the peasant. Jesus’ strategy, implicitly for himself and explicitly for his followers, was the combination of free healing, teaching and common eating, a religious and economic egalitarianism that negated alike and at once the hierarchical and patronal normalcies of Jewish religion and Roman power. And, lest he himself be interpreted as simply the new broker of a new God, he moved on constantly, settling down neither at Nazareth nor at Capernaum. He was neither broker nor mediator but,

somewhat paradoxically, the announcer that neither should exist between humanity and divinity or between humanity and itself. Miracle and parable, healing and eating were calculated to force individuals into unmediated physical and spiritual contact with God and unmediated physical and spiritual contact with one another. He announced, in other words, the unmediated or brokerless Kingdom of God.”

As the diversity of opinions about Jesus’ nature and mission multiplied after his death we will look at a few more opinions of Jesus’ message and possible self-understanding during his earthly lifetime.

6.5 Jesus according to Thomas with inputs from John

I find it very exiting that the straightforward gnostic-mystical Gospel of Thomas could be related to the elaborate but also mystical Gospel of John. They both want to “witness about the ‘Light’, that all might believe through him. He was not himself the Light, but came that he should testify about the Light.” (Gospel of John 1:6-9, Schonfield translation) The question to ask is, what must our belief consist of to be salvic; the revelations of the Logos, his origins and mission, his deeds, his potential mystical presence in ourselves or all of them in a certain order? Schonfield (1998:473) says John is not the beloved disciple who was an illiterate peasant, while the writer of this Gospel was composed by a Greek Christian of behalf of Jesus. His way of thinking also indicates influences of other the wisdom traditions.

Another follower of Jesus called Jude or Judas (not Iscariot) also had a bilingual nickname, “the Twin” – Didymos in Greek and Thomas in Aramaic or Syriac. This is the figure immortalized as Doubting Thomas. We know about his leadership and authority and his competition with alternative figures such as Peter and Matthew, from the Gospel of Thomas 13. The obligation to seek is ours and the answers are available within and without, the privilege to reveal is God’s, and in this order; no third party interventions allowed, you will have to experience and intuit the answers yourself. But, do not play your cultic and visionary games of hypocrisy and apocalyptic abracadabra’s, God

knows your heart and mind; He/She is the All. To gain an idea of the spirituality of this Gospel here are a few sayings to consider, as translated by Thomas O. Lambdin (1990).

(2) Jesus said, "Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will become troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will be astonished, and he will rule over the All."

(3) Jesus said, "If those who lead you say to you, 'See, the kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in."

(17) Jesus said, "I shall give you what no eye has seen and what no ear has heard and what no hand has touched and what has never occurred to the human mind."

(22) Jesus saw infants being suckled. He said to his disciples, "These infants being suckled are like those who enter the kingdom." They said to him, "Shall we then, as children, enter the kingdom?" Jesus said to them, "When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female; and when you fashion eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness; then will you enter the kingdom."

(24) His disciples said to him, "Show us the place where you are, since it is necessary for us to seek it." He said to them, "Whoever has ears, let him hear. There is light within a man of light, and he lights up the whole world. If he does not shine, he is darkness."

(39) Jesus said, "The Pharisees and the scribes have taken the keys of knowledge (gnosis) and hidden them. They themselves have not entered, nor have they allowed to enter those who wish to. You, however, be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves."

(45) Jesus said, "Grapes are not harvested from thorns, nor are figs gathered from thistles, for they do not produce fruit. A good man brings forth good from his storehouse; an evil man brings forth evil things from his evil storehouse, which is in his heart, and says evil things. For out of the abundance of the heart he brings forth evil things."

(46) Jesus said, "Among those born of women, from Adam until John the Baptist, there is no one so superior to John the Baptist that his eyes should not be lowered (before him). Yet I have said, whichever one of you comes to be a child will be acquainted with the kingdom and will become superior to John."

(51) His disciples said to him, "When will the repose of the dead come about, and when will the new world come?" He said to them, "What you look forward to has already come, but you do not recognize it."

(53) His disciples said to him, "Is circumcision beneficial or not?" He said to them, "If it were beneficial, their father would beget them already circumcised from their mother. Rather, the true circumcision in spirit has become completely profitable."

(62) Jesus said, "It is to those who are worthy of my mysteries that I tell my mysteries."

(70) Jesus said, "That which you have will save you if you bring it forth from yourselves. That which you do not have within you will kill you if you do not have it within you."

(77) Jesus said, "It is I who am the light which is above them all. It is I who am the all. From me did the all come forth, and unto me did the all extend."

Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there."

(94) Jesus said, "He who seeks will find, and he who knocks will be let in."

(102) Jesus said, "Woe to the Pharisees, for they are like a dog sleeping in the manger of oxen, for neither does he eat nor does he let the oxen eat."

(106) Jesus said, "When you make the two one, you will become the sons of man, and when you say, 'Mountain, move away,' it will move away."

(108) Jesus said, "He who will drink from my mouth will become like me. I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him."

(113) His disciples said to him, "When will the kingdom come?" Jesus said, "It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying 'here it is' or 'there it is.' Rather, the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it."

Stevan L. Davies (1992:1) says the following about the Gospel of Thomas, "A consensus is emerging in American scholarship that the Gospel of Thomas is a text independent of the synoptics and that it was compiled in the mid to late first century." J.H. Sieber (Goehring et al 1990:69,70) maintains the position that "there is very little redactional evidence, if any, for holding that our Synoptic Gospels were the sources of Thomas' synoptic sayings. In the great majority of sayings there is no such evidence at all....As of the date of this article (1988) almost all those who are currently at work on Thomas have come to hold that it represents an independent tradition".

Thomas evidently knows of Christocentricity, eschatological traditions carried forward in the name of Jesus' disciples and seeks to undermine those traditions by corrective question-response passages, says Davies (1992:2). Gos. Thom. 51 provides a particularly clear example: "His disciples said to him, 'When

will the repose of the dead come about and when will the new world come?' He said to them, 'What you look forward to has already come, but you do not recognize it.' "

Further, Christological investigation of the scriptures is actually condemned in saying 52. In Gos. Thom. 91, when they ask to know who Jesus is, they are encouraged rather to know what is in front of them and to know the nature of the present time. Discovery of the true nature of the world and oneself is the goal commended in Thomas. This evidently entails the discovery of Jesus, but such discovery is not the goal itself. The eternal light of Genesis through which the world was created persists in the world and in the people. Jesus physically came and informed people of the possibility of actualizing that light.

"Whereas the canonical Gospels focus largely on Christological concerns, such concerns in Thomas are secondary, if not misguided", says Davies. "This is logically entailed in Thomas's overall perspective. If one discovers oneself actually and other people potentially to possess the light and to be the image of God, one thereby discovers also what Jesus is. They will exist in the condition of the image of God (saying 22) and in that sense may be considered images of their divine Father. They will not, of course, worship themselves but the divine Father whose image they are.

"A person who has actualized the primordial light has become (is reborn as) an infant (saying 22) at precisely seven days of age (saying 4), for he dwells in the seventh day of Genesis. Reflecting the fact that the kingdom of God, like the light, is within and outside of people, such 'infants' have made what is inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and have restored the primordial condition of the image of God; this is the meaning of Gos. Thom. 22.

"Thomas offers a view of Christian transformation not terribly different from the Pauline view." (Davies 1992:70) "For Paul, Christ is the Image of God (cf. 2 Cor 4:4) and the "second Adam" who is the man of heaven. He writes that

‘as was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven’ (1 Cor 15:45-49) who is Christ, the image of God. Indeed, according to the author of Colossians, Christ is ‘the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation’” (Col 1:15). Robin Scroggs (Davies 1992:70) believes Col 3:9-11 provides a particularly clear statement of this theme of renewal into the image of God: the image of God is the goal of man's renewal, and Christ as the Last Adam is the image to which man will conform. Even so, however, man does not become an image of Christ, but the image of God, conformable to Christ who now already exists as that image. For Paul, then, man will one day be restored to the image of God.

That restoration for Thomas is within the individual's power now. Insofar as Paul believes that people can (or will soon) attain to the condition of Christ, the image of God and thus replace the condition of Adam of Genesis 2 with the condition of the image of God of Genesis 1, Davies believes that the Thomasine and Pauline ideas are similar.

‘The man of light (saying 24) is the restored image of God (saying 22), but it is only as the former that he is manifest to the world; and so Jesus, the exemplary man of light, declares, ‘I am the light’ (saying 77). To those who have actualized the image of the Father the primordial light will be manifest within themselves.

“Thomas does not advocate that people seek Jesus the person but rather that people seeking Jesus should seek the light and the kingdom of God. To find the body of Jesus, the living one, and to live from it is to find the light of the world and to live in that. There is no idea in Thomas of a ‘risen Christ,’ and ideas drawn from the conception as it is found in other NT texts are therefore not applicable.

“For the Gospel of Thomas the light through which God created the world persists in the world and within people. Those aware of this may live now in

the seventh day of Genesis. Those not aware of this live in the condition they were born to, the condition that has prevailed for historical humanity from the time of Adam (saying 85) to the time of John the Baptist (saying 46) and thereafter, for if one fails to actualize the possibility of bringing forth what is inherent in oneself, one dies (saying 70)." (Davies 1992:3)

In summary, says Davies (1992:4), "Thomas presents a dualism of perspectives and urges people to 'seek and find' a new view of the world, a view it claims Jesus himself advocated and embodied. Insofar as the world in its perfect condition, the kingdom of heaven, is thought to be above, that conception of the world is to be applied to the world below: 'make that which is above like that which is below' (saying 22). Yet the kingdom is not really a place above (saying 3) but a primordial time, a time that persists in the present. All things, all people came from it, for all were created as specified in Gen 1:1-2:4. All can return there now by actualizing primordial light within themselves and seeing that light spread throughout the world, thus making the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside (saying 22). To return to the kingdom one remains standing on the earth, but with an altered conception of it. The theme of a salvific or restorative return to the time of primordial mythic origins is, of course, a theme commonly encountered in religions throughout the world."

"It is commonplace in early Christianity that a person who has received the Spirit is one to whom the things that are hidden will be revealed (see, e.g., 1 Cor 2:10-13 [1 Cor 2:9//Gos. Thom. 17]; John 14:26). Further, such a one is like Jesus (John 14:12-17) or, indeed, is one who may identify with Jesus (Gos. Thom. 108; cf. Gal 2:20). Gos. Thom. 13 and 108 seem, therefore, to state that through possession by the same Spirit individuals become equivalent to or identified with Jesus." (Davies, 1992:4)

Alexander Mirkovic (1995:1), in his work on "Johannine Sayings in the Gospel of Thomas: The Sayings Traditions in their Environment of First Century Syria", reports that Fall, 1995, says that: "Assuming that the Gospel of Thomas originated in Syria, the first step would be to establish intertextual

relationship, if there is any, with other early Christian literary works originating from the same geographical and cultural environment. In this paper I have limited this task to the Gospel of John, because the Johannine community, in my opinion, belongs to the same geographical and socio-cultural environment. Furthermore, the Johannine community, not unlike the Thomasine community, found itself on the periphery of the early Church. The difference is that the Gospel of John was preserved for the patristic Church by an ecclesiastical redactor. Thomas Christianity was 'lost' when it crossed the borders of the Roman Empire and went deeper into Mesopotamia and further east to India."

"The similarity between John and Thomas lies in their portrayal of Jesus as a fully self-conscious sage - redeemer whose words and judgments are true and flawless", says Mirkovic (1995:2) "Both gospels claim: to understand Jesus and his words is to achieve salvation. Raymond Brown, nevertheless, established the fact that the gospels of John and Thomas have some common material. He explains this common material by presupposing that the redactor of Thomas borrowed from John. A turning point in scholarship on John-Thomas relationship occurred with a continuing interest of Helmut Koester in the problem, resulting in Koester's book 'Ancient Christian Gospels'. The most radical step in interpretation of the John-Thomas relationship was undertaken by Gregory Riley. He argues, convincingly that there was a close interaction." (Mirkovic 1995:3)

Mirkovic (1995:4) says, "This paper argues that the sayings of Jesus were 'produced' outside the early Palestinian community and focuses on the sayings created and transmitted by Syrian holy men and women. Furthermore, the theological closeness of the two gospels, especially the self-consciousness of Jesus that permeates both texts indicates that similar socio-cultural factors shaped the beliefs about Jesus in both communities. In sum, I argue that the parallel material in the gospels of John and Thomas is a product of the same *Sitz im Leben*, namely, the wisdom of wandering ascetics in the first century Syria.

“The existence of Syrian tradition of divine human is clearly attested to by Celsus (late second century). Origen agrees with the existence of the phenomenon, but disagrees with Celsus in his evaluation of divine humans. Celsus complains that in Palestine and Syria there are many who go begging both inside and outside temples, some of them gathering crowds and frequenting cities or camps, and these men are of course urged to prophesy. It is routine for them to be ready with 'I am god', or 'a son of a god' or 'a divine spirit'; and 'I have come, for the universe is already perishing, and you, men, will die because of your wrongdoing, but I want to save you, and you shall see me once again returning with heavenly power. Happy is the man who has worshipped me on this occasion. Against all the rest, in town and country alike, I shall cast eternal fire. And men who are unaware of the impending punishment will repent in vain and wail, but those I have persuaded I shall protect forever.’”

The conclusion of Mirkovic's (1995:5) study is that the analysis of the parallel sayings material in John and Thomas has shown not only the similarity of tenor and diction, as Raymond Brown believed. The parallels represent the world, Jesus, discipleship, salvation in a very comparable way. Indeed, one may even speak about the common theology of the parallels. The summary of the similarities would be as follows:

1. The image of the living God as an unknown Father (GTh 3, GJn 6:57; GTh 18, GJn 8:44; GTh 40, GJn 15:1). Of particular interest is the phrase the living Father, which occurs in both gospels and never in the Synoptics, or anywhere else in the New Testament.
2. The world is a carcass (GTh 56, GJn 15:19 & 17:14). It belongs to the devil (GTh 18, GJn 8:44). It is marked by the contrast between flesh and spirit (GTh 29, GJn 3:6, 6:63).
3. The beginning and the end of the world are one and the same with the present (GTh 18, GJn 8:44, GTh 19, GJn 17:5). Both gospels engage in

speculations about the beginning, but on a scale nothing like the developed cosmogony of the second century Gnosticism.

4. The Redeemer received everything from the Father (GTh 61, GJn 3:35 & 13:3). Who keeps his words will not taste death (GTh 1 & 111, GJn 8:51).
5. The Redeemer has come into this world of poverty (GTh 28, GJn 1:10-12)
6. The Redeemer is light (GTh 77, GJn 8:12).
7. The Redeemer is the teacher GTh 13, while for the most part in John teacher has a negative connotation of a Jewish leader in GJn 13:13-14, the Washing of the Feet episode shows him to be a true teacher, to be different from the socially accepted teachers.
8. The Redeemer speaks with remarkable assurance. He needs no proof for his testimony (GTh 3, GJn 4:42 & 8:13). He is the light (GTh 77, GJn 8:12). He is the living water (GTh 13, GJn 4:13). This particular idea, that is, that the redeemer needs no proof for his words, parallels the Stoic idea of cataleptic impressions.
9. The discipleship is about becoming like the Redeemer (GTh 108, GJn 7:38), renouncing the world (GTh 110, GJn 7:35), being like a little child (GTh 4, GJn 3:4), and worshipping the Father (GTh 15, GJn 4:21-23).
10. The most important prerequisite of the discipleship is listening to the words of Jesus (GTh 19, GJn 15:7, see also: GTh 1 & 111, GJn 8:51) and keeping them (GTh 78, 79, GJn 8:32).
11. The disciples will never see death (GTh 1, 111, GJn 8:51, GJn 21:23 a tradition that the beloved disciple will not die: The saying spread

abroad among the brethren that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

12. The Redeemer has departed which makes his words even more important (GTh 38, GJn 7:34). One has to seek him, and will not always find him.

"Besides using several similar theological concepts like, 'the beginning,' 'light,' 'darkness,' 'flesh,' 'spirit,' 'knowledge,' 'understanding,' 'living Father,' 'to know,' 'to seek,' 'to find' John and Thomas use similar metaphors for Jesus, some taken from the imagery of agricultural life like: 'water,' 'spring,' 'well,' 'vine,' 'shepherd,' 'sheep,' 'fish,' 'net.' This common imagery indicates a common sauce-cultural setting, namely, wandering ascetics and their orally transmitted teaching." Furthermore, Mirkovic (1995:6) believes that the parallels have shown that the gospels of John and Thomas are not directly dependent. "There are only two instances where we have the verbatim agreement and where one can suspect the borrowing. But this verbatim agreement is not enough to establish a literary dependence. Rather, the phrases look very much like favourite sayings of wandering sages. The type of similarity indicates an oral tradition, rather than literary dependence.

"The setting of the parallel tradition sayings is defined by several factors. First, we have two communities in which salvation comes through the transmission, listening, and interpretation of the words of Jesus (GTh 1, 19, GJn 8:51, 15:7). We should not immediately assume that the words of Jesus could come only from Q, or the Synoptic tradition in general. Second, the gigantic self-consciousness of Jesus permeates both gospels. Jesus for both Thomas and John is infinitely more important than the world.

"If at least a part of the Gospel of Thomas was composed and transmitted in the environment of the wandering ascetics, Thomas has added their sayings to the already established tradition of Jesus' sayings from Palestine. A similar process we can follow in John. As long as Johannine community stayed in

Syria it faced the same social, cultural and historical forces that Thomas faced; this should be enough to explain the similarities in the parallels. Could it be the case that in the early second century a part of Johannine community left Syria and moved to Ephesus where the gospel was redacted in line with the emerging patristic Church and saved from sinking into oblivion? We will probably never know this. But we know that the Gospel of Thomas had a different path. It was saved from oblivion by an illiterate Egyptian peasant fifty years ago.” (Mirkovic 1995:6) In sum, it seems that Mirkovic believes that the parallels between the two gospels demand from us to seek the forgotten wisdom of illiterate, or semi-literate wandering sages of the ancient Near East.

What is interesting is not the obvious “perennial philosophy” of realising the divine within and living it here and now, as revealed by Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas, but that scholars are now formally looking at this phenomenon in John, while realising the many parallels and the different inputs from the broader society. Jesus is the revealer and exemplar of the Spirit operational in man, which is again part of the universal Spirit of God, which is again everywhere and in all. In Thomas and John it becomes virtually an open secret, while in the synoptics the perennial philosophy is part of the inner teachings or esoteric, gnostic teachings.

6.6 The Spiritual Messages of the Aramaic Jesus

This is a summary with comments on the spiritual messages of the Aramaic Jesus, from Neil Douglas-Klotz’s (1999) audio book, “The Hidden Gospel”. This very special book offers us an experience of the power and mystery hidden behind the traditional words of Jesus, when viewed from the perspective of his native Aramaic language. This new understanding of the meaning of Jesus’ words is developed in eight “keys” or insights, designed to revitalize our spiritual life – or to help you “raise yourself from the dead”. These tools will help you connect with the Divine, come into balance, and open to the full wisdom that Jesus brought the world.

“Aramaic was the native language of both Jesus (Yeshua) and the indigenous people in Palestine who made up his audience. Ancient (or biblical) Hebrew, as a spoken language, had already died out by his time, after various segments of the Jewish people returned from captivity in Babylon beginning in the third century B.C.E. It was replaced by a similar language: Aramaic. Like Hebrew, Aramaic allows for multiple translations and interpretations of Jesus’ words. The Hidden Gospel explores how these additional possibilities reveal a Jesus who was connected to the body, to nature, and to the cosmos. These elements of Jesus’ teaching have largely been exiled from Christian spirituality by centuries of Western theological speculation.

“The difference between these extended translations lies in the fact that in Aramaic one word can have different meanings in different contexts and can also be understood differently depending on the situation”, says Douglas-Klotz (1999:1). Therefore he gives the possible interpretations that Jesus’ listeners could have perceived.

The first key: My breath is part of the Holy Spirit

‘Alaha Ruhau’—KJV –‘God is a spirit’(Gospel of John 4:24)

“Alternative possible translations: ‘God is breath’. From my breath to the air we share to the wind that blows around the planet: Sacred Unity inspires all. All that breathes resides in the Only Being.

“This translation from the Aramaic version (above) are based on the fact that the Aramaic word for ‘spirit’ also means ‘breath’, ‘air’, or ‘wind’. The word for ‘God’ really means ‘Sacred Unity’, ‘Oneness’, or ‘the Only Being’. In this view, ‘my breath’ is not separate from the Holy Spirit and every being is embedded in Sacred Unity.

“The first Beatitude (Matthew 5:3) – usually translated (KJV) ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ – can be read in Aramaic to refer to the important fact that breath is our first and last possession. When we

remember this, we begin to participate in the ruling vision and empowerment behind the cosmos (a more Aramaic translation of 'kingdom'). From the Aramaic, this Beatitude might accurately be translated as 'Happy are those who find their only home is the breath; their 'I can!' (Personal empowerment) is included in God's; or as 'Blessedly ripe are those who have only their breath'." Douglas-Klotz 1996:2) (Who revere their breath as the only important possession and not material things.)

The second key: "God" means no one and nothing is excluded

"The Aramaic word that Jesus used most commonly for God means 'Sacred Unity'. Thus, every being is held within the heart of the Sacred. There is no ultimate separation between humanity and God, nature and God, or humanity and nature. These illusions are based on Greek and European world views, which were foreign to Jesus. Our English word "God" (based on a Germanic root meaning 'Good') reflects this reparative thinking by implying that God is the only "good".

"In addition, Alaha (Sacred Unity) includes what Middle Eastern psychology would call our inner community of voices: the various aspects of the subconscious that influence us, for instance, the sometimes conflicted ways in which we love, work, and learn. It is through and in Alaha that we find the resolution of both inner and outer divisions.

The third key: God gives birth every moment. Everything is born in blessing.

"'Abwoon d'bashmaya'--(Matthew 6:9) usually translated, 'Our Father, which art in heaven. Alternative possibilities: 'O Thou, the One from whom breath enters being in all radiant forms'. 'O Parent of the universe, from your deep interior comes the next wave of shining life'.

"This is just one example of how the Aramaic words of Jesus reflect a more intimate version of the Divine: one that simultaneously created the world;

interconnected with all of its parts; and called every created thing ‘perfect’, or complete in and of itself.

“As we intone the first word of the line – A-BW-OO-N – we can participate in Middle Eastern mystical prayer by feeling the sounds of the syllables and remembering the story of the creation of the universe. In both Aramaic and Hebrew, the individual parts of the word point to the following meanings: ‘A’ can remind us of our Source – Alaha, the Only Being. ‘BW’ reminds us of the continual process of giving birth, in which the universe participates. ‘OO’ points to the Breath/Spirit of all, through which this birth happens. ‘N’ points to the creation of new and diverse beings. By remembering this process, we have the opportunity to be “born anew” each day.” (Douglas-Klotz 1999:4)

The fourth key: “Goodness” means “Ripeness”

“The Aramaic words for good (tub) and evil/bad (bisha) carry the essential meanings of ‘ripe’ and ‘unripe’. This distinction takes these concepts out of the realm of external moral standards and into the realm of timing. We are called upon to be in tune and in time with the cosmos, ready for the planting of the seeds of our destiny. The first word of the Beatitudes in Matthew’s version (usually translated as ‘blessed’) uses the root for ‘ripeness’. To be in a blessed state means to find one’s condition, whatever it may be, within the fabric of divine timing, or ripeness.

“As we move into this sacred rhythm, we may come across areas of our experience that are confused or wandering. Jesus used the second Beatitude (usually translated, ‘Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted’) to talk about how we gather these parts of ourselves together. (To become complete or whole) In Aramaic, the words ‘Tubwayhun lawile d’hinnon netbayun’ imply that when we embrace the ‘lost’ parts of ourselves, the inner creative force will help us find the resources we need.

“In the third Beatitude, Tubwayhun l’makikhe d’hinnon nertun arha (usually translated, ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth’), we find this

affirmation: ‘Blessedly ripe are those who soften what is rigid within, for they shall receive strength and vigour, their natural inheritance, from the energy of nature all around them.’

“We intone the key words of the third Beatitude – ‘Tubwayhun ... nertun arha’ (‘ripe ... receive strength from nature’) – to affirm our connection, through the manifested cosmos, with the Source of all Being. A similar meaning emerges in the fourth Beatitude (‘Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled). The Aramaic word for ‘righteousness’ – ‘khenuta’ – can mean ‘an inner unity’; a time when the multiple voices of the self and a physical sense of justice all come together.” (Douglas-Klotz 1999:6)

The fifth key: “Love” means giving birth to a new self

“The Aramaic word ‘rahme’ comes from an ancient Middle Eastern root that means ‘womb’ – the source of all creation and birth, radiating from the darkness. Jesus uses this word (usually translated as ‘love’) to express that the highest form of love gives birth to a new sense of self, in both ourselves and others. We can help those we love to become who they are really meant to be, rather than holding them back or hanging on to whom we think they are.

“The fifth Beatitude (usually translated, ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy’) can be rendered from the Aramaic as: ‘Tubwayhun lamrahmane dalayhun nehwn rahme’—‘Blessed are those who, from their inner wombs, birth mercy; they shall feel its warm arms embrace them’.

“The sixth Beatitude (usually translated, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’) also deals with an expanded sense of love. To be ‘pure’ or ‘perfect’ in Aramaic carries the meaning of being ‘all-embracing’ or complete. It can be rendered from the Aramaic as: ‘Tubwayhun layleyn dadkeyn b’lebhon d’hinnon nehzun l’alaha’—‘Healthy are those whose passion is completely electrified by deep, abiding purpose – they shall see God everywhere.’

“To meditate on the meaning of the central word from the fifth Beatitude, along with the name of Sacred Unity can help us focus on being part of the cosmic process of love and creation. We can also affirm this birthing power in all of our relationships: ‘Alaha Rah-may’---‘Unity gives birth through us every moment. God is life-giving love’.

The sixth key: “Eternal life” means embodied, renewable energy, here and now.

“John 10:10 quotes Jesus as saying, “I have come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.” The Aramaic word for life (hayye) refers to embodied life energy – not an abstract condition, far away or at some other time or place. Likewise, when Jesus says in John 3:16, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life’, the phrase ‘eternal life’ – or in Aramaic, hayye d-alma – refers to all the worlds of form that we can experience in the here and now.

“Other sayings of Jesus in John that use the ‘I am’ formula (such as ‘I am the bread of life’ – John 6:35) also point in Aramaic to a source of renewable life energy; a state of simple presence in which our own individual sense of self is found contained within the only I Am – that of the Divine. Since ‘God’ means nothing is excluded, our small ‘I am’ (as well as that of Jesus) is contained within Sacred Unity.

“In this sense, the passage in John 6:35 can be rendered from the Aramaic as: ‘Inana lachma d’hayye’—the ‘I am’ – residing in Simple Presence – is the food that gives life energy to all creation”. (Douglas-Klotz 1999:7)

The seventh key: “Peace” means, not the absence of war, but rather the fullness of potential.

“Shalama -- the Aramaic word for ‘peace’ -- points to the state of creative possibility that was present as the beginning of the universe. As we remember this state -- which is contained deep within the cells of our being -- many of the riddles in our relationships, work, life, and love begin to clarify.

“The seventh Beatitude (usually translated, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God’) also points to this state of deep peace. It can be rendered from the Aramaic as: ‘Tubwayhun lahwyday shlama dawnaw (hie) d’alaha nitqarun’—‘Ripe are those who plant peace each season, for they shall become hollowed out as channels and fountains of Unity.’

The eighth key: To be raised from the dead means to find your own rhythm in relation to divine Unity.

“John 11:25 quotes Jesus saying (in the KJV translation), ‘I am the resurrection and the life’. From the Aramaic Bible, this can be rendered: ‘Inana nuhama wa hayye’— The ‘I am’ -- residing in Simple Presence -- provides renewal and energy’. The way that we can find this renewal is by discovering our place, in ripeness, in the texture of cosmic Unity.

“By attuning to the words of Jesus in his native language, by feeling their sound and resonance in our bodies, by allowing the feelings that arise to be contained in a more complete knowledge of our own ‘I am’, we can enter into the state of blessed ripeness that he experienced. By doing so, we can become fountains of healing and inspiration, as he was. As he said (as translated from the Aramaic), ‘Those who have the same rooted confidence in Unity that I have shall do the things that I do, and greater than these.’ (John 14:12)” (Douglas-Klotz 1999:11)

If this is a possible understanding of what Jesus meant when he said these sayings, there was either conspiracy or total lack of understanding of Aramaic spirituality when it was translated into Greek and later into other languages. The universal and perennial wisdom and spirituality are obvious and it opens very exciting new ways to understand his teachings.

7. THE JEWISH JESUS MOVEMENTS

Some of James' followers were adamantly opposed to the perceived abandonment of the Jewish Torah by some "gentile Christians". By the time of Irenaeus in the second century, however, these followers of James, known as the Ebionites, were themselves deemed "heretical" by the now mostly gentile Christian Church. It was now Irenaeus' turn to denounce them as little different from "the Jews". From an early age these Jewish Christians, if one can call them that, believed in the need to remain Jewish and any new convert to "the Way", as they called the religion of Jesus, would have to agree to submit to Jewish rituals, Jewish dietary laws, and Jewish rituals, including circumcision, and other Jewish beliefs. Religion was, for the Ebionites, Judaism, because they were Jews, just as Jesus had been a Jew. They did not believe in the divinity of Christ – they were disputing it as late as the second century when Irenaeus denounced them as heretics. They did not believe that he was born of a Virgin – how could a sect which had as its leader one of Jesus' brothers believe anything so fantastic?

According to an admirer, Hegesippus, James was an ascetic, abstaining both from strong drink and from shaving. The epistle which is attributed to him might have been written by someone else but it reflects the Ebionite piety. It seems to be unmystical, ethical and accessible. "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27) So bitterly has this epistle been hated by Orthodox Christians that they have even questioned whether it is Christian at all. No reference is made of belief in sacrificial atonement for salvation or cosmic, divine status for Jesus. Luther

used to tear it from the Bible whenever he found it, denouncing it is an epistle of straw, for it advocates goodness and self-restraint and says nothing about Justification by Faith Only. That is of course a correct deduction by Luther because he wanted to read his misinterpretation of Paul's arguments back into Jesus' religion. The historian A.N. Wilson (1992:249) says, "this new brand of religion is called by some 'Cross-tianity', but Jesus would doubtless have found it (Ebonite's) puritanical but closer in spirit to his own ideas than those of Paul, Irenaeus or Luther, who in his vilely anti-Jewish tirades anticipated the worst excesses of the Third Reich."

The early church fathers traced Jewish believers who believed in Jesus until the third century. The Gentile Church did not know how to handle them because they remained Jewish. The Jewish Community did not know what to do with them because they believed that Jesus was their spiritual Messiah. They were caught in between, much as the Messianic Jewish synagogues of today.

A broad picture is coming to light. It looks like, for James and Peter, Jesus' Messiahship was mainly based on that of a special prophet in the tradition of Moses, and from the prophecy of Moses. This theme is also picked up from Stephen's speech in Acts 7:35-53. It is also clear that Stephen did not hold a high regard for the temple cult and it was the main reason why he also was killed.

James was the head of the Jerusalem group; Peter was initially a missionary for the Jewish people, and Paul for the Gentiles. That the Jerusalem group after the "Council of Jerusalem" divided in two factions; those who did agree with James, that the Gentiles should be treated under the more lenient "Covenant of Noah", and the Judaizers who wanted strict observance of the law. It appears that the more lenient group became known as the Nazarenes and the Judaizers were the Ebionites. They denied Jesus' virgin birth and his deity. They did not believe that his death brought salvation, for the grace of God must be appropriated for yourself by righteous living. For them, the teaching of the deity of Christ was an assault on true monotheism.

Most Ebionites rejected Paul as an apostle and preferred the leadership and teaching of Peter whom they saw as the “Apostle to the Circumcision”. They insisted on the keeping of the seventh day as the Sabbath. The Ebionite movement appears to have died out by the first century (www.eaglewing.org.uk/ebion.html).

“The Ebionites also interpreted the Eucharist as a memorial of Jesus. They did not view Jesus’ death as a bloody act of atonement. Irenaeus says, that in the Gospel that is in general use among them, is called ‘according to Matthew’ however, their Gospel says: ‘I have come to do away with sacrifices, and if you cease not sacrificing, the wrath of God will not cease from you.’ (Epiphanius, Parnarion 30. 16,4-5). It is evident from the work of other scholars that certain groups were dead against sacrifices and were vegetarians.” (Keith Allers, all-creatures.org).

The Ebionites followed the Elchasaite vision of the Christ as the recurrent ‘secret Adam’ a supernatural figure, which embeds Jesus at his baptism and left him at the crucifixion, says Heinemann (1992:173).

This Ebionite “Hebrew” gospel is considered to be a modified version of Matthew (or vice versa?). More accurately, it appears to be a harmony of all the synoptic gospels, with some subtle changes to reflect the writer’s theology. Most importantly, the Ebionites believed in an “adoptionist” Christology – that Jesus was fully human, but was chosen as the Son of God at his baptism. However, Epiphanius also states that they believed Jesus to have been “created like one of the archangels”. The gospel also makes vegetarians of Jesus and John the Baptist by modifying Luke 22:15, and changing the Baptist’s diet from locusts to cake. Two things stand out; they were dead against sacrifices and Jesus was a mortal man who revealed the Spirit in to a very special degree.

“Jewish Christian works was also influenced by Essenism as can be recognized in ‘The Didache’ and the Shepherd of Hermas (Ascension of Isaiah

+ II Enoch), Epistle of Barnabas and Gospel of Peter (later Judaism).” Danielou (1964:23) The Gospel of Thomas seems to have come down by way of a different tradition closer to the original Aramaic. In this connection the work is of interest for the Exegesis of the New Testament and seen by Danielou (1964:24) as carrying certain features which are typical of Jewish Christianity. “Also, the Gospels of the Hebrews and Egyptians with their prominent roles of James reveal Essene influences. The special instruction reserved by Christ for his chosen apostles represents a kind of higher enlightenment, a gnosis. This theme occurs again in the Epistle of the Apostles and was taken up and used by the Gnostics for their own, who claimed in this way to have authority for their teaching.

“The Ebionites, according to Epiphanius, had a daily ritual bath and they had a baptism of initiation and each year they celebrated certain mysteries of initiation. They used unleavened bread and water in their mystery rituals.” (Danielou, 1964:56) This is another indication of the popularity and universality of the concepts of the Mysteries.

“The Ebionite doctrine is Essenism with a colouring of Christianity”, says Danielou (1964:67). “Christ becomes the last of the true prophets. The first book of Homilies tells of the true prophet and the true understanding of the Law in conformity with the teaching of the tradition of Moses. This is one of the most important parts of the work. They had the conception of Christ as the true Prophet (Hom. I, 19), then that of Adam as the first incarnation of the true Prophet, and free from sin. (Hom. III, 17-28). This is a direct echo of the Essene doctrine of the succession of the prophets.”

“Therefore, the pattern of Elkesaism also begins to emerge as a kind of Ebionism influenced by the theology of the Great Church. The Gnostic elements are those drawn from Jewish Christian theology: the theme of the descent through the heavens, the doctrine of the Son and the Spirit as angels. It seems to be very close to the Ascension of Isaiah or the Gospel of Peter. It is furthermore of vital importance for our knowledge of Jewish Christian

theology and liturgy. Its heresy lies in the fact that it regarded Jesus as a mere prophet." (Daniélou, 1964:67).

"Cerinthus has certain points in common with the views already studied. Like the Ebionites he sees Jesus as an ordinary man on whom 'Christ' descended at Baptism. Moreover, Cerinthus is related to Jewish heterodoxy when he affirms that angels created the world. It was quite definitely this heterodox Jewish Christianity in Asia which St. John was concerned to combat. It has been noted that this carnal Messianism seems to have developed mainly in Asia Minor. It was not simply a matter of sins of gluttony and drunkenness, but of manifestations of religious messianism. Several of the features to be found in Cerinthus, in particular the rejection of the resurrection of Christ and of the practice of baptism for the dead, are similar to those condemned by Paul in I Corinthians. These various features begin to reveal the character of this group. They are men of strictly Jewish origin, which explains their associations with the Ebionites and the early Gnostics. Their thoughts are centred on the Parousia, the coming of the Messianic age, which they conceive as being essentially earthly. In this they are profoundly opposed to the Ebionites. Their expectation of the Messiah crystallizes in a millenarian doctrine and in this way they are representative of the whole current of heterodox views in Asia, which may be seen in The Apocalypse and in Papias. Their hope is centred on this earth. For some of them the Messianic times have already arrived – an idea that is expressed in the orgiastic character of their feasts, an expression of Messianic festivity." (Danielou 1964:355)

By now it will have become apparent that the same complexity was prevalent in the Jewish world and its sects, at the time of Christ, as was reflected in the various currents of Jewish Christianity in the Great Church. It found its counterpart in the various forms of heterodox Jewish Christianity. If Ebionism is a continuation of the Essene community, and the Cerinthians a development of zealot Messianism, the sects which have now to be considered are still more closely connected with heterodox Jewish sects, and in particular with the Samaritans.

“In A.D. 70, however, the Jews and the Jewish ‘Christians’ were dispersed. A small group remained, probably in Transjordan, clinging to the successor of James who at that time was probably Simeon (HE IV, 22:4). These were to form the group of the Nazarenes. But the majority went elsewhere to Syria, Antioch then becoming the centre of Jewish Christianity. There the most important Jewish Christian body, the Judaeo-Syriac was formed. It was paramount not only in the sphere of creative theology of the katabasis and anabasis – but also in the sphere of authority. A hierarchy grew up in Antioch on the model of the one in Jerusalem, and claiming to be its successor. Possibly it already based its authority on that of Peter and he made his sojourn there, the basis of a claim to a primacy in authority. However that may be, it seems to have become the first local Church after Jerusalem to show a hierarchy with two ranks and to have at its head a successor of the Apostles.” (Daniélou, 1964:356)

“During the course of the sixties the most influential leaders of the first generation Christians died: James (62), Peter (64), and Paul (67). At the same time historical events were conspiring to move the Christians further away from Judaism and towards a separate identity as a dominantly Gentile Christian Church. In Antioch the Jewish and Jewish-Christian communities were not directly influenced by the events of the war of 66-70 CE. Josephus (*Bellum Judaicum*, ii. 457-479) reports how Jews were attacked in cities outside Jerusalem in anticipation that they might join the revolt. One can only presume that with the outbreak of anti-Jewish feeling Christians would endeavour to separate themselves more fully as a religion from Judaism. This would lead naturally to the diminishing of the influence of Jewish Christianity. One could say that prior to 70 CE Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Antioch were the most influential and strangest group. However, after the war their position evaporated. The destruction of the Temple also influenced Jewish Christians negatively.” (Daniélou 1964:357)

“Within a decade of the fall of Jerusalem the gospel of Matthew was written in Antioch. Some interesting information can be gleaned from its pages. In fact, one can view this Gospel as having come to terms with the influence that

Pharisaism was having within Judaism after the fall of Jerusalem. In particular the Pharisees were attracting converts from among those same people that the Christians were endeavouring to win over to their views. Matthew's Gospel contains numerous harsh sayings against the Pharisees." (Hartin 1991:40) "These sayings, Neusner argues convincingly, can be seen as a reaction to the success the Pharisees were experiencing to the detriment of the Jewish Christians. He refers to 'the competition between the Pharisees and the Christian missionaries for the loyalty of the mass of Jews'. The Gospel of Matthew shows how the Christians contrasted themselves more and more to the rising Pharisaism of the period after the war. The picture that Matthew paints of Jesus is no longer that of a wandering charismatic prophet which the picture of the earliest Gospel of Mark represents. Instead, Jesus is a rabbi who has the authority to provide binding interpretations of the Jewish Law (Mt. 5:17): "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them."

At the same time the leaders of the Christian community are seen to exercise a similar role of authoritative interpretation; just like the Jewish rabbis the Christian community's leaders exercise an authoritative role in interpreting the Scriptures for faith and action (Mt. 16:19, 18:18). "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." As Meier (Hartin 1991:42) comments on this passage: Rather, Matthew is presenting Peter as the chief Rabbi of the universal church, with power to make 'halakic' decisions (i.e., decisions on conduct) in the light of the teaching of Jesus.

"On forty-four occasions Matthew quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures (most of these quotations do not appear in the other Gospels). In presenting these quotations he is showing his understanding and interpretation of those Scriptures sacred to Judaism. Quite probably some of the quotations that Matthew employs were used in sharp contrast to the way in which they were being interpreted by Pharisaic Judaism of that period. For example, Hosea 6:5 is quoted and interpreted by Johanan ben Zakkia (Goldin in Hartin 1991:42), in the following way: sacrifice in the Temple is now replaced by the kind of

life one leads and the actions that are inspired by a loving and generous heart: Be not grieved. We have another atonement as effective this. And what is? It is acts of loving kindness, as it is said, 'For I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'

"This also points to the way in which the community of Matthew in Antioch had changed. From the strict desire for ritual observance among those who followed James, Matthew is now arguing for a position whereby the Christians are set free from the minute observance of the Jewish law, for an emphasis that is placed on the heart. The implications of this understanding of Matthew and his community are most important. The disputes with the Pharisees concern the very nature of the relation of the community to the traditions of the past. Both the Pharisees and the community of Matthew believed that they were the true heirs of these traditions.

"Not much is known about Christianity in Antioch immediately after the Gospel of Matthew." Hartin (1991:45). "The next information that we have of it comes from the writings of Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch who wrote between 108-110 CE. In contrast to the middle-of-the-road Jewish Christian teachers of the community of Matthew a new generation emerged in which the leaders were no longer Jewish, but Gentile. In particular the direction of Paul and this thought emerged triumphant. Nothing in Ignatius echoes Matthew's concern for the Christian leadership to parallel that of the scribes and Pharisees. The main reason for this change in direction stems from the continued success that the Christian church was having in bringing ever more Gentiles into its ranks. At the same time the mission to the Jews had been in effect blocked.

"By the turn of the first century of our era Antioch had become a predominantly Gentile Christian Church with Jewish Christians in the minority. Pockets of Jewish Christians continued to be influential in areas in Syria for a couple of centuries to come. However, they were no longer in the mainstream of Christianity, nor were they directing it as in the past. They were very much on the periphery and were looked upon with suspicion by mainstream Christianity. A quick glance at two groups of Jewish Christians

will illustrate how Jewish Christianity continued to survive in the area of Palestine-Syria and in the vicinity of Antioch.

“The first century of the Common Era was a period in which both Judaism and Christianity sought to unify their teachings and their positions. With Christianity it was a process in which it had to reconcile opposing groups within itself, as well as to define itself with regard to Judaism. In the context of Christianity, apart from the Gospel of Matthew, the centre of consideration focused upon groups and thought within Christianity itself. The views of James, Peter, Paul and Ignatius all related to the views of groups within early Christianity. At first Jewish Christians who endeavoured to continue their links with Jewish tradition were the ones to give the most influential direction. This was finally replaced by the ascendancy of Gentile Christianity. In other words, a new paradigm triumphed with the paradigm of Jewish Christianity being relegated to the margins of Christianity, and ultimately disappearing after a number of brave centuries in which it strived to survive.

“Until the time of Ignatius, those who argued with Judaism and Jewish traditions did so from the perspective of being Jews. Paul and Matthew, for example, each in his own way was convinced that the message that he preached was the real inheritor of the traditions of Israel. Matthew quoted frequently from the Hebrew Scriptures in order to demonstrate that his understanding and the Jewish Christianity that adhered to this understanding was its true successor. Likewise, Paul presented the Christian faith as the true successor of the faith of Abraham, and right until the end of his life he struggled with the problem of why his fellow Jews were not able to come with him along the path of his understanding of how the Christian faith is the true inheritor of Abraham’s faith. The main problem, of course, is that Abraham’s faith was definitely not the same as Paul’s, but was used by Paul to get to a more simple faith system than that of the present day Judaizers.” (Hartin 1991:44,47) Hartin says, his study demonstrates how the message of Jesus of Nazareth was transposed from the world of Judaism into the world of the Greeks and Romans. In such a transition one sees a paradigm shift taking place from one cultural world to another. It is interesting to observe in the

history of Christianity, when Christian missionaries endeavoured to transpose Christianity into other cultural worlds such as Africa, China, or South America, how very often the attempt had been to try to preserve the Graeco-Roman clothing of the package, instead of following the example of the paradigm shift that occurred in the early Christian church, of moving from the paradigm of Judaism to that of the Graeco-Roman world .

“The Didache is plainly also at its basis quite definitely a Jewish Christian work. In its original form it dates back to the first Christian community at Jerusalem, though it was no doubt developed after 70 A.D. in a Syrian community. Finally, the extant version has undergone some touching up later than the second century. Nevertheless, it is possibly the most valuable surviving document of Jewish Christian literature. After the Didache, the most previous document still in existence relating to the Jewish Christian liturgy is the Odes of Solomon (and thereafter the Gospel of Peter and Gospel of the Hebrews).” Danielou 1964:322) It is obvious, fascinating and surprising that this catechism was still in use in the second century and perhaps longer, without any reference to the “divine sacrifice” of Jesus as the salvic principle. The teaching of the “Two Ways” is followed by baptism and a remembrance meal that make out its focuses.

Summary

It seems like ‘Jewish Christianity’ in fact can have different manifestations:

1. Those groups whose opinion about Jesus placed them midway between Judaism and Christianity; they acknowledge Jesus to be a special prophet, even a Messiah, in the tradition of Moses and the Essenes, but in no way did they look upon him as a divine Son of God. A James’ group and later Ebionites would belong to this group who insisted upon the full observance of the Jewish Law as well as circumcision; they were referred to as the Judaizers. Then there were those who demanded some form of observance of the gentile groups to certain

Jewish laws, but did not insist upon circumcision: this was the position of James and Peter.

2. A form of Christian thought which expresses itself in terms which have been borrowed from Judaism in group one, but was improvised and developed into a Jewish version of the universal Mysteries, now open to all, as represented by Paul. They saw the Christian as free from all dietary laws as well as circumcision. For Paul the "Christ spirit" was analogous to the Holy Spirit working in Jesus. Jesus is special but neither divine or co-equal with the Father, but after Paul's death, things changed dramatically and in harmony with the growth of Gentile Christianity, Jesus became the Cosmic Christ and later, God incarnated. The Synoptics also used the basic plot elements of the Mysteries in their versions of the 'history' of Jesus, without giving us an exact or agreed upon birth date or birthplace.
3. Those groups that would embrace some of the elements of Judaism, especially its wisdom traditions, and Jesus as sage and mystic, as well as the universal mystical philosophies expounded in the Mystery traditions, like Thomas and John, but who saw no abiding significance in the Jewish cult and feasts. These groups are represented by the Gospels of John and Thomas.
4. Gentile Gnostic groups, using various combinations of Egyptian, Hermetic, Greek and Mystery philosophies with Jewish elements, but incorporating Jesus as the Hero, Revealer or Saviour of their gnostic system.

While all four groups were probably in evidence in Antioch at different times, it was particularly group 2, that of Paul, that triumphed and exercised the most influence, especially after the catastrophic happenings of 70 C.E. in Jerusalem. We will then look at Paul's contribution to "gentile" Christianity and soteriology and correlate it to scholarship on Jewish Christianity.

8. PAUL THE FIRST "CHRISTIAN" THEOLOGIAN

An understanding of the theology of Paul is essential to any understanding of Early Christianity. Firstly, however, we have to understand Paul himself, his background, the world he lived in, his personal development and spiritual quests. If Paul was born in Tarsus and grew up there, he was exposed to a very interesting and stimulating environment. Tarsus was home to a very active academic institution which was believed to be the centre of Stoic learning and also the birthplace of the very popular mysteries of Mithra, in its post Persian form. Tarsus was also near the town where the famous Temple of Aesculapius was operating as a training centre and hospital for the healing arts. It was here that his contemporary Apollonius was trained and from where this spiritual genius started his life mission. Paul identified best with Pharisaic Judaism although he must have been in the High Priest's employ when he prosecuted the followers of Jesus in Stevens' time. In his long religious career he doubtlessly looked into all other major philosophies and cults of religion and metaphysics to qualify him as the apostle of the gentile mission.

It is my opinion that Paul's letters and the theology derived from them, must be carefully considered and viewed within his broader knowledge and experience of these philosophical and religious influences and specifically as special apologetic writings addressed to a myriad of possible sects. He had to restore "normalcy" through a necessarily graded teaching process of missionary persuasion and catechism, as well to defend his own unique mystical experience against the "Judaizers". One cannot simply interpret all his writings as part of his argument and deduce a systematic theology from them, it can be misleading. In selling his brand of Christianity to the Gentiles, he necessarily had to argue from where his customers found themselves and therefore his metaphors and explanations will differ from community to community and will depend on the particular sect he confronts.

To complicate matters further Paul had to reckon with the realities and practicalities of stratified religious systems, which start from the national perspective on religion, then the tribal, social or communal perspective and

lastly the personal perspective from own spirituality that also includes the mystical stream. Furthermore, any sensitive, intelligent person who pursues his own spiritual quest knows that human moral development has to start with external discipline and rules which should develop to self-discipline and hopefully mature into moral compassionate living. You will have to be prepared and equipped to cater for the spiritual needs of all the stages of development and your argumentation will have to be specific to the level of development of your hearers, or else serious miscommunication would result. If the hearers were not homogeneous, or were in different phases of spiritual development, miscommunication to some is inevitable. Add to this Paul's complex personality, our meagre knowledge of the religious and cultic variety of his time and a vague understanding of his broad mission, as well as the fact that we currently have only selected writings of him that are mainly targeted at specific problems; this complexity and uncertainties make our understanding of Paul extremely difficult. We can at best only try to construct a "likely story" of his psychological and spiritual profile in a very diverse and complex reality, while revising it regularly as associated disciplines and new finds inform us in an ongoing process towards better understanding.

One thing stands out clearly though in considering all the variables in cultures, levels of education, philosophies, the importance of religious activities and stages of spiritual development of its peoples, while at the same time, targeting all the different groups on their own terms with a new religion: this is not a job for any ordinary person. Add to this enormous complexity the problem that Paul started from Judaism which was only now, through Jesus and Paul, coming out of the mould of a national or tribal religion; while the majority of the Jewish people were still hoping for a Messiah of national liberation, one can only have great respect for Paul's efforts and versatility.

It is therefore impossible to even try to construct a theology of Paul with limited time and space available, but we need to make an effort to understand Paul's metaphors and concepts because that could be helpful to know from where they came and to investigate how they were used within the groups

from which they were borrowed and whether Paul gave a new meaning to it. We have a special interest in his theory of salvation and related ideas.

8.1 Paul and the Resurrected Christ

“What happened on Easter Sunday?” asks Crossan (1994:159). “Is that the story of one day or of several years? Is that the story of all Christians gathered together as a single group in Jerusalem? Or is that the story of but one group among several, maybe of one group which claimed to be the whole? Firstly, resurrection is but one way, not the only way of expressing Christian faith. Second, apparition, which involves trance, an altered state of consciousness, is but one way, not the only way, of expressing Christian experience. Third, Christian faith experiences are the continuation of divine empowerment through Jesus, but that continuation began only after his death and burial. Where, then, did all the emphasis on resurrection come from? In a word, from Paul.” We will come back to this fact with additional motivation for it on Paul’s account.

During the winter of 53 or 54 C.E. – that is, from twenty to forty years before the New Testament gospels gave us their last chapters – Paul was writing to the church he had founded at Corinth and defending the possibility and actuality of bodily resurrection. As you read 1 Corinthians 15:12-20, watch very carefully the logic of his argument and pay special attention to the verses Crossan (1994:164) has italicized:

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? *If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ – whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.* If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we

are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.”

Paul never argues that Jesus’ resurrection was a special privilege afforded only to him. That would have been a perfectly possible proposal, since Judaism believed that Elijah, for example, had been taken up to heaven but never widened that privilege to all others as well. Why was Jesus not just another special case, another individual prerogative with no wider application than himself? Why, as the italics emphasize, is Jesus’ resurrection actually dependent on the general resurrection? (Crossan 1994:164)

“It has often been said that Paul believed the end of the world was at hand. It is more accurate to say that he believed it had already begun, for that is his logic in the preceding passage. As a Pharisee he believed in the general resurrection at the end of time. But Jesus, he claims, has already risen as the start of the general resurrection. Notice his metaphor. Jesus is the “first fruits” – that is to say, the beginning of the harvest, the start of the general resurrection. That is why he can argue in either direction: no Jesus resurrection, no general resurrection; or, no general resurrection, no Jesus resurrection. They stand or fall together and Paul presumes that only the mercy of God delays the final consummation, the ending of what has already started. The Titanic has, as it were, already hit the iceberg, and Paul’s mission is to waken the cabins as far and as wide as possible – while God gives time. In such a theological vision, resurrection is the only possible way to articulate the presence of Jesus for Paul, but it is also inextricably linked to the imminent general resurrection at the end of the world. But if the end is not imminent, is resurrection still the best way to put it? Is first fruits a credible metaphor if the harvest is long delayed? For Paul, in any case, resurrection is the only way that Jesus’ continued presence could be expressed. The question is whether he speaks for all Christians then and thereafter.” (Crossan, 1994:165)

Crossan’s (1994:167) point is not that Paul was wrong but that his emphasis on resurrection was but one way of expressing early Christian faith and should not be taken as normative for all others. “Consider another section in 1

Corinthians 15:1-11, and focus especially on apparition to see, once again, how Paul's own experience and expression have been taken as normative for all others rather than as one among many. What is emphasized in this text is its profoundly political implications. It is not primarily interested in trance, ecstasy, apparition, or revelation, but in authority, power, leadership, and priority. The thrust of that description is not just its emphasis on the risen apparitions of Jesus but its insistence that Paul himself is an apostle – that is, one specifically called and designated by God and Jesus to take a leadership role in the early church. Notice three elements. There is, first of all, the balance of Cephas and the Twelve against James and the apostles.

“As far as Luke, who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, is concerned, Paul was not one of the Twelve Apostles and could never have been one since he had not been with Jesus from the beginning. There is a second element dependent on that first one. Paul is very interested in equating his own experience of the risen Jesus with that of all others before him. Hence he always uses that same expression, *appeared to* or *was revealed to*, in all instances. There can be no doubt that Paul's own experience involved trance – that altered state of consciousness already discussed. Luke gives three accounts of Paul's initial revelatory experience, in Acts 9:3-4, 22:6-7, and 26:13-14. They all agree on its dissociative character.” (Crossan, 1994:167)

“Paul's experience of the risen Jesus certainly occurred in a trance. But that trance neither furnishes any new information nor creates the raw materials of faith. It only confirms, strengthens, or enforces what was already there. Paul, for example, tells us repeatedly that he was a persecutor of Christianity before he was called to become the apostle to the pagans. He knew enough about this new Jewish sect to oppose it deeply, and the result of his dissociative experience was not just to stop persecution, not just to become a Christian, not just to become a missionary, but to become the apostle of the pagans. I suspect that it was the Christians' opening of Judaism to paganism and their willingness to abandon any ritual tradition standing in their way that had caused his initial persecution of Christianity, and that it was precisely what he had persecuted them for that he now accepted as his destiny. Jesus was

revealed to all of them, but Paul's own entranced revelation should not be presumed to be the model for all others." Crossan says that apparitions or revelations, detail the origins of Christian leadership, not the origins of Christian faith. To my mind Paul's vision represents two objectives, that of a power claim as Crossan says, but it resulted in the formalization of the Mystery and Gnostic strains of Christianity, which was the strategy by which Paul approached his mission and apologetics.

Second, Crossan (1994:170) proposes that, "other stories in the gospel, from before the execution of Jesus – the so-called nature miracles – serve the same function. They are not about Jesus' physical power over the world but about the apostles' spiritual power over the community. Apparition is the conferral of authority. That is why Jesus spends no time in revealing heavenly mysteries or divine secrets. What is important (to the authors) is to whom he appears, not what he says. These are dramatizations of power and visualizations of authority."

Crossan (1994:186) then continues to show how the leadership game was played by the different writers of the Gospels and Acts, especially favouring Peter, while John tried his best to be a close second and Mary Magdalene, Thomas and James falling out of the leadership race. "The race to the grave stories tell us nothing whatsoever about the origins of Christian faith but quite a lot about the origins of Christian authority. They tell us about power and leadership in the earliest Christian communities. They tell us about the establishment of leadership groups over general communities and they tell us very clearly about competing specific leaders within and among those groups."

"What happened historically is that those who believed in Jesus before his execution continued to do so afterward. Easter is not about the start of a new faith but about the continuation of an old one. That is the only miracle and the only mystery, and it is more than enough of both. Of course there may have been trances and visions. There always are such events in every religion, and there is no reason to think Paul was alone in this. But that is not all that

happened. There were those, first of all, whose unshod feet hurt and continued to hurt from Galilean roads. And there were also those who searched the scriptures to see what this all meant. It is a terrible trivialization to imagine that all Jesus' followers lost their faith on Good Friday and had it restored by apparitions on Easter Sunday. It is another trivialization to presume that even those who lost their nerve, fled, and hid also lost their faith, hope, and love. It is a final trivialization to mistake stories about competing Christian authority for stories about inaugural Christian experience." (Crossan, 1994:191)

On a physical level Paul might have thought of Jesus as a Prophet-messiah according to the tradition of Adam and Moses of the Essenes, or that he was the Spiritual Adam of the Secret Lore of Creation or a combination thereof in different company. On an esoteric level the emphasizing of the risen status of Jesus is noteworthy, also because that says to us that Paul's then, specific, periodical interest is not in the "earthly" Jesus, but the "twice born" or spiritual Jesus, who now manifest the true spiritual likeness of God, through the Spiritual Adam, which must be our true nature. All spiritually mature initiates must be twice born and follow in the footsteps of Jesus as the reborn or resurrected "Christ", becoming "christs" themselves, by manifesting the Spirit of the heavenly Adam or Christ.

8.2 Paul on Salvation

Sanders (1977:157) says that only the most unregenerate sinners were excluded from the covenant and the covenant promises becomes most apparent when we study the passages on atonement for transgression. "The universally held view is this: God has appointed means of atonement for every transgression, except in the intention to reject God and his covenant. That is, those who are in the covenant will remain in and will receive the covenantal promises (including a share in the world to come) unless they remove themselves by 'casting off the yoke'. No matter how numerous a man's transgressions, God has provided for forgiveness, as long as man indicates his intention to remain in the covenant by repenting and doing other appropriate acts of atonement." Sanders says, that the passages, which indicate

this view are very numerous and that there is no opinions to the contrary. He gives representative examples and discusses them to prove this point.

If we add to this point, our conclusions of David's unwavering faith in the mercy and grace of God and his love for those who realise, acknowledge and battle with their human frailties, while humbly trying to serve His spiritual Kingdom, then we must only account for the excessive novel reliance on the sacrificial death of Jesus. This idea taken from all of the ancient Jewish and Pagan cults is now adopted again as a necessary instrument of divine retribution but then still it is called, saved by "faith" or "grace" alone. To understand Paul's use of this powerful metaphor we need to look at the history and functions of sacrifice.

8.2.1 Sacrifice and Cults, to Metaphor and Spiritual Maturity

Paul firstly had to understand what Jesus meant to him, who grew up in Jewish home but in a cosmopolitan city and, then only, how he could incorporate his insights into the Gentile expectations by "explaining" it to them to match their understanding. Considering the frightening variety of Jewish and Gentile spiritual and cultural biases this had to be innovative and creative thinking. The more difficult question is what was Paul's view of the historical Jesus and how did he arrived at the saviour concept from a crucified prophet or type of Messiah. The "second coming" was more in line with general apocalyptic expectations or "general religious knowledge", and frankly of not much spiritual value. All these end time "prophecies" proved not to be of any real help to the spiritual pilgrims in any case, except for getting them killed by the Romans.

We have traced the guilt of eating creatures that lived, as a spiritual dilemma, to the earliest of time. This gave rise to the practice of compensatory sacrifices to try and even the scoreboard, which later developed into specific "atonement" rituals, as well as thanksgiving and "special request" sacrificial practices to the please the gods. All cultic religions develop these practices, which are organised, motivated and presided over by the priests as third party

“mediators” between the heavenly Powers and the people as to relieve their customers’ guilt complexes and as the main income source of the Cult’s management. This was equally true of the Jewish Temple Cult, managed by the High Priest and his staff and controlled by the Sadducee management council. In the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were more active in religious theorizing and teaching as well as doing theology. The more mature spiritual seekers will therefore be more in tune with the religion’s teachers, for personal spiritual development, than its priests. The Temple Cult, representing national interests, had a life of its own and must survive despite all the theological differences of the teachers. All through the ages the spiritually adept individuals knew of this two tier religious reality and virtually ignored it, if not opposed its primitive sacrificial core. As this theory is important to our argument, let us look at some evidence of this sentiment. Firstly, let us look at the most probable metaphor for the Jesus sacrifice and then at the combined wisdom on this subject.

8.2.2 An Old Model for Salvation Applied to a New Sacrifice

One such example is the ritual of the Jewish Day of Atonement, which has two goats, one driven out into the desert carrying the sins of the people and the other presented for sacrifice in the Temple. The basic text is in Leviticus 16:7-10 and 21-22, describing the ritual as mandated by God to Aaron, the first High Priest:

He [Aaron] shall take the two goats and set them before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting; and Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel ... Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat

shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness.

“You, as a Jerusalem Jew, have probably seen that actual ritual and are not just imagining it from the biblical text alone. We, however, also know four precise details about that ritual’s actual process from the Mishnah, the rabbinical code of law organized around 200 C.E. by Judah the Patriarch. The two goats had to be alike and equal; scarlet wool was placed on the scapegoat’s head; it was abused by the people as it was hurried toward the desert; and before it was killed there, the scarlet wool was attached between a rock and its horns. You would have known that the scarlet wool recalled Isaiah 1:18 and God’s promise: ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool’. And, as long as you were thinking about Isaiah, that abuse in which the people symbolically and emphatically transferred their sins to the poor doomed animal reminded you of Isaiah 50:6: ‘I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting’. You knew that the people spat their sins onto the scapegoat and that they used reeds to poke and hurry the poor animal toward its desert fate. Such spitting and poking or piercing was not, of course, just cruelty but a physical participation in the ritual itself.

“The choice of the Day of Atonement and its twin goats was not, to be quite frank, a very happy one. Jesus could easily be interpreted as the scapegoat, the goat driven and killed outside the city as atonement for the sins of the people. But that second goat is also sacrificed, albeit in the Temple itself, and that sounds just like another but different version of the passion. Something more was clearly needed and it was there, as far as we can see, from the beginning.” (Crossan 1994:147)

Crossan then uses Leviticus 16:23-24, Zechariah 3:3-5, 12:10 and Isaiah 50 in conjunction with its synthesis in the Epistle of Barnabas 7:6-12 to show that the exegetical laminations such as these were what certain learned followers of Jesus were creating in the years immediately after his death. “Notice that it

was passion and parousia rather than passion and resurrection on which they were concentrating. They were interested in linking the departure of Jesus on the cross to his return at the end of the world. The Day of Atonement symbolism - and other similar examples - is what the prophetic passion looked like for years and continued to look like for skilled exegetes long after the next stage, the narrative passion, developed and separated from it.

“How did that next stage develop? The intertextual dexterity of the Epistle of Barnabas 7 is quite brilliant, and it is also supportive or probative - from the Hebrew Scriptures - for the passion-parousia destiny of Jesus”, says Crossan (1994:154). But it can hardly be called a good story or even a narrative sequence, let alone a historical memoir. Something more is absolutely necessary to change exegesis into story; some model is required to change argument into narrative. Taking into consideration that none of the canonical gospels’ narrative, read in parallel, agrees with each other in any detail, Crossan’s best historical reconstruction of what actually happened is that Jesus was arrested during the Passover festival and that those closest to him fled for their own safety. He does not presume at all any high-level consultations between Caiaphas and Pilate about, or with, Jesus. They would no doubt have agreed before such a festival that fast and immediate action had to be taken against any disturbance and that some examples by crucifixion might be especially useful at the start. Crossan doubts very much if Jewish police and Roman soldiery needed to go too far up the chain of command in handling a Galilean peasant like Jesus. “It is hard for us, I repeat, to bring our imagination down low enough to see the casual brutality with which he was probably taken and executed. The details in our gospels are, in any case, prophecy historicized and not history memorized.” (Crossan, 1994:152)

8.2.3 Wisdom’s Opinion on Sacrifices

Since early times opinions have differed widely as to the moral and religious value of sacrifices. Although both prayer and sacrifices have been among the basic expressions of worship since the very dawn of human history it is generally assumed that sacrifices reflect a more primitive stage of religious

evolution. “Maimonides thought that the biblical sacrifices were instituted by way of a compromise, since the people could not have grasped the idea of a religion without sacrifices, and that they were intended to wean the people away from corresponding idolatrous practices. Nahmanides and other cabbalists insisted on the moral and spiritual symbolism of the details of the ritual, as well as on the significance of the sacrificial ideas as such. Today Orthodox prayer books retain the prayers for the restoration of the sacrificial cult in the rebuilt Temple, while the Reform movement has omitted or rephrased these passages in keeping with the conception of sacrifices as a once adequate but now outmoded form of worship.” (Posner 1975: 129)

Firstly, let us look at non-biblical wisdom

“The words of a Japanese Confucian in the ninth century are, according to Jaspers (1957:49), quite in the spirit of Confucius “The superior man’s path begins with the concerns of the common man and woman, but it reaches into the distance, penetrating heaven and earth.” “If only the heart follows the path of truth, you need not pray, the gods will protect you.”

Socrates just knows that the true and the good man who lives by reason and the inner “voice” is in harmony with the gods and need not fear death. “Whatever the truth about death may be, for a good man, he was convinced there is no evil, neither in life nor in death.” (Jaspers, 1957: 14)

Pythagoras was a strict vegetarian and totally against sacrifices. His verses also promise man that if he will rise above his lower material nature and cultivate self-control, he will ultimately be acceptable in the sight of the gods, be reunited with them, and partake of their immortality. (Hall 1977: LXVIII)

“Plato was very weary of the ill effects of the myths and mythic gods on the minds of children. Furthermore, he questioned and opposed the concept that atonement for sins can be obtained by sacrifices. Plato was far from denying the existence of the gods but the concepts and understanding about the gods needed an urgent facelift. The gods on their part, he was sure, desired none of

the superstitious worship, neither the magical rituals that men developed in their honour. They desire and expect only that each man shall engage in the proper tendance of his soul and seek the supreme good, that which the high god has set before them. Firm in these beliefs, Plato in old age contended that atheism or any assertion that God is indifferent to men or can be bought off by gifts, offerings and sacrifices should be treated as dangerous to society. (Noss 1980:53)

Apollonius' repeated statements that he would never join in the blood sacrifices of the popular cults and by openly condemning them, showed not only that he agreed with the Pythagorean school, but always set the example of the higher way, of purer spiritual offerings. When put on trial Apollonius, (like Socrates) would make no preparation for his defence. He had lived his life as it came from day to day, prepared for death, and would continue to do so. Moreover, it was now his deliberate choice to challenge death in the cause of philosophy and spirituality.

"In his letters Apollonius also wrote a number of treatises of which only one or two fragments have been preserved. In the *Mystic Rites, or Concerning Sacrifices*, he said, 'It is best to make no sacrifice to God at all, no lighting of a fire, no calling Him by any name that men employ for things of sense. For God is over all, the first; and only after Him, do come the other gods. For He doth stand in need of naught even from the Gods, much less from us small men – naught that the earth brings forth, nor any life she nurseth, or even any thing the stainless air contains. The only fitting sacrifice to God is man's best reason, and the word that comes from out his mouth.' Another quote, 'We men should ask the best of beings through the best thing in us, for what is good – I mean by means of mind, for mind needs no material things to make its prayer. So then, to God, the mighty One, who's over all, no sacrifice should ever be lit up.'" (Mead, 1966:154)

"The city of philosophy and eclecticism par excellence (Alexandria), received him with open arms as an old friend. But to reform the public cults of Egypt was a far more difficult task than any he had previously attempted. Here as

elsewhere Apollonius set his face against blood-sacrifice, and tried to substitute instead, as he had attempted elsewhere, the offering of frankincense modelled in the form of the victim. Many abuses he tried to reform in the manners of the Alexandrians, but upon none was he more severe than on their wild excitement over horse racing, which frequently led to bloodshed." (Mead 1966:97)

"Naught would Apollonius wear that came from a dead beast, nor touch a morsel of a thing that once had life, nor offer it in sacrifice; not for him to stain with blood the altars; but honey-cakes and incense, and the service of his song went upward from the man unto the Gods, for well he knew that they would take such gifts far rather than the oxen in their hundreds with the knife. For he, in sooth, held converse with the Gods and learned from them how they were pleased with men and how displeased, and thence as well he drew his nature-lore. Writing to the priests of Delphi against the practice of blood-sacrifice he says: 'Heraclitus was a sage, but even he never advised the people of Ephesus to wash out mud with mud.' That is, to expiate blood-guiltiness with blood-sacrifice." (Mead 1966:148). The higher duty of the sage is that he must be prepared to die for his principles and the truths he holds dear. Exactly what Socrates and Apollonius' contemporary, Jesus, demonstrated to us as special moral and spiritual examples.

"The Essenes also believed Jesus was a man like any other. Christ is the good principle existing from the beginning and came to rest on Jesus at the moment of this baptism in a form of the dove. Nor is this Christ the Son of God, but a higher archangel, the one whom the Rule of the Community calls the Prince of Light (DSD III, 20). Thus Jesus is a prophet who is assisted by the 'Angel of Good', this angel also rested on Adam (Parnarion XXX, 3) and on Moses and the other prophets. It also speaks of a condemnation of sacrifices; the bloody sacrifices of the Temple were substituted by the praise of the lips (DSD IX, 5). The Ebionites exaggerated this negative attitude to sacrifices and suppressed sacrificial scenes in the Pentateuch as well as that 'a certain number of additions containing falsehoods against the only God' were added when the Law was put in writing (Home. II, 38). They preferred James and John to

Peter, and looked upon Paul as their enemy because of his rejection of the Law (page 60). God, having appointed two kingdoms, established also two ages ... Every man has the power to obey whichever of them he pleases.” (Hom. XX, 2 – 3) (Daniélou (1964:60, 61)

“On forty-four occasions, Matthew quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures (most of these quotations do not appear in the other Gospels). In presenting these quotations, he is showing his understanding and interpretation of those Scriptures sacred to Judaism. Quite probably, some of the quotations that Matthew employs were used in sharp contrast to the way in which they were being interpreted by Pharisaic Judaism of that period. Hosea 6:5 is quoted and interpreted by Johanan ben Zakkia in the following way: ‘Sacrifice in the Temple is now replaced by the kind of life one leads and the actions that are inspired by a loving and generous heart: Be not grieved. We have another method of atonement as effective as this. And what is it? It is acts of loving kindness, as it is said, ‘For I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ ” (Goldin in Hartin 1991:43)

“They (the Ebionites) said, that Jesus said, ‘I come to do away with sacrifices, and if you cease not sacrificing, the wrath of God will not cease from you.’” (Epiphanius, Parnarion 30. 16, 4-5).

Biblical evidence

“My sins, O God, are not hidden from you; you know how foolish I have been.” And further on: “I will praise God with a song; I will proclaim his greatness by giving him thanks. This will please the Lord more than offering him cattle, more than sacrificing a full-grown bull.” (Psalm 69: 1, 30 – 31)

“You do not want sacrifices, or I would offer them; you are not pleased with burnt offerings. My sacrifice is a humble spirit, O God; you will not reject a humble and repentant heart.” (Psalm 51: 16 – 17)

“You do not want sacrifices and offerings; you do not ask for animals burnt whole on the altar or for sacrifices to take away sin. Instead, you have given me ears to hear you, and so I answered, ‘Here I am; your instructions for me are in the book of the Law. How I love to do your will, my God! I keep your teaching in my heart.’ “In the assembly of all your people, Lord, I told the good news that you save us. You know that I will never stop telling it. I have not kept the news of salvation to myself; I have always spoken of your faithfulness and help. In the assembly of all your people I have not been silent about your loyalty and constant love. Lord, I know you will never stop being merciful to me. Your love and loyalty will always keep me safe.” (Psalm 40: 6 – 11)

“I do not reprimand you because of your sacrifices and burnt-offerings you always bring me. And yet I do not need bulls from your farms or goats from your flocks; all the animals in the forest are mine and the cattle on thousands of hills. All the wild birds are mine and all the things in the fields. If I were hungry, I would not ask you for food, for the world and everything in it are mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Let the giving of thanks be your sacrifice to God, and give the Almighty all that you promised.” And further: “But God says to the wicked, ‘Why should you recite my commandments? Why should you talk about my covenant? You refuse to let me correct you; you reject my commands. You become the friend of every thief you see and you associate with adulteresses. You are always ready to speak evil; you never hesitate to tell lies. You are ready to accuse your own brothers and to find fault with them. You have done all this, and I have said nothing, so you thought that I was like you. But now I reprimand you and make the matter plain to you. Listen to this, you that ignore me, or I will destroy you, and there will be no one to save you. Giving thanks is the sacrifice that honours me, and I will surely save all who obey me.’ (Psalm 50: 7 – 14, 16 – 23)

“As far as the east from the west, so far does he remove our sins from us. As a father is kind to his children, so the Lord is kind to those who honour him. He

knows what we are made of; he remembers that we are dust.” (Psalm 103; 2 – 3, 8 – 14)

“Receive my prayer as incense, my uplifted hands as an evening sacrifice.” (Psalm 141:1,2)

Solomon in Ecclesiastes:

- “Be careful when drawing near to God. Seek not to sacrifice or appease; seek only to hear.” (4:17a)
- “The fool rushes into sacrifice, hoping to buy what is free to all.” (4:17b)
- “Better to stand silent to listen. Better to be taught by Silence than distracted by teaching. Better to receive wisdom than to give in to illusion.” (4:17c)

8.2.4 Paul’s opinion on Sacrifices

That the metaphor of a divine sacrifice was excellent to rid people permanently of the need to sacrifice for atonement, is accepted. Furthermore, it was handy for Paul to hook on to the mythic constructs of other outer mysteries of the descending and ascending saviour and dying hero or god-man saviour. Alas, I think he and Jesus would definitely be very upset with the way certain strains of Christianity retrogressed to just another type of sacrificial cult. When I looked for Paul’s position on sacrificial duties I could not find any indication that he was an ardent supporter of this primitive practice. Neither, for that matter could I detect any enthusiasm from Jesus on this topic. In fact James and the Ebionites were totally against sacrifices and the expectation is that they shared these sentiments as inheritance from Jesus. If both were “regular” Jews in the Judaic tradition it seems that they were respecting their brothers’ cultic participation but that they rather shared the vision of the more spiritual enlightened brethren of all denominations and orientations in this respect.

How would Paul get his converts from first base, that of primitive superstitious sacrificial worship, to the second base of responsible ethical behaviour without closing the sacrificial and priestly mediatory phase of their spiritual journey? How better can that be accomplished than by letting the new universally acceptable social and moral hero die a final sacrificial death, so that their spiritual life can continue from this higher level, never to return again to this primitive theological construct of appeasing God's wrath with blood. How better can he get rid of the "mediators", obstructing direct relationship with God, than having a once and for all High Priest on standby in heaven, if one should be needed. How sad that this ingenious effort of Paul to rid people of these frightening and sickly religious practices in their religion, was so grossly misunderstood by literal interpretation that it became the cornerstone of Christianity again! The result is that we are back, spiritually, in the dark primitive ages while living in a scientific era of space travel and the unravelling the human genome.

8.3 Paul had many Arguments, but One Multilayered Message

No two elements of Paul's thought are more certain or more consistently expressed, says Sanders (1977:448), than his conviction that the full salvation of believers and the destruction of unbelievers lay in the near future and his related conviction that Christians possessed the Spirit as the present guarantee of future salvation. (I Cor. 15, esp. vv. 23-28; I Thess. 4.15-17; Phil. 3.18-21) "The various passages just listed answer different questions, but they seem to be generally coherent: Christ will come, believers will be saved, unbelievers destroyed and all things put into subjection to God. It is true that I Cor. 15 does not provide for the general resurrection and judgment (and thus not for the destruction of unbelievers), but this need not lead either to Schweitzer's theory of two resurrections and two judgments (Christ's at the beginning of the Messianic kingdom and God's at the general resurrection), nor to the conclusion that Paul had no coherent view. In I Cor. 15 Paul is concerned to prove that the resurrection is in fact to come, just as in I Thessalonians he is concerned to answer the question of what happens to those who die before the end."

Sanders (1977:448) say that the expectation of the coming of the Lord is very frequent in Paul's letters, and it is this general point we are concerned to establish here. "Thus Paul writes that the faith of the Thessalonians is well known, how they turned from idols to serve the true and living God, 'and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.' (I Thess. 1.9f.). That the Lord is at hand (Phil. 4.5) and the time near (I Cor. 7.29, 31; 10.11; Rom. 13.11) and the Day of the Lord expected suddenly (I Thess. 5.2; cf. Phil... 1.6; 1 Cor. 5.5) are often repeated. Christians are to be faultless, holy and blameless on the Day of the Lord (I Thess. 3.13; 5.23; Phil. 1.10; I Cor. 1.7f.). The future hope in Christ (I Thess. 1.3) may be specified either as the hope of salvation (I Thess. 5.8) or as the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5.5). It is of special interest to Paul that on the Day of the Lord his work will be vindicated. Those who are saved by hearing his gospel and who are found blameless at the Day will show that he is a true apostle (I Thess. 2.19: 'For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?' Phil. 2.14-16: '... that you may be blameless and innocent ..., so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain'; cf. II Cor. 1.14). Further, his work as an apostle, as well as that of others, will be tested (I Cor. 3.10-15; 4.5).

"It is further to be observed that the verb 'save' in Paul is generally future or present, but only once past tense", says Sanders (1977:449). "Even here, however, Paul writes that 'we were saved in hope' (Rom. 8.24). More characteristic are such passages as 'we shall be saved through him from the wrath' (Rom. 5.9); 'if you confess ... and believe ... you shall be saved' (Rom. 10.9); 'in order that his spirit may be saved on the Day of the Lord' (I Cor. 5.5; effectively future); 'in order that in all ways I may save some' (I Cor. 9.22; cf. Rom. 11.14). Especially striking is the use of the present passive participles 'being saved' and 'being destroyed' in I Cor. 1.18 (The word of the cross is folly to those being destroyed but the power of God to those being saved) and II Cor. 2.15 ('For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing'). That the work of

salvation is already under way will concern us later; here we may also note the present tenses in I Cor. 7.31, 'the form of this world is passing away'. II Cor. 3.18, 'we ... are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another', and II Cor. 4.16, 'our inner nature is being renewed every day' (contrast the future in Phil. 3.21), 'who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body'). In any case, the consummation is still in the future.

"We may finally note that the resurrection is future", says Sanders (1977:450). "This distinction is maintained by Paul even when the discussion of participation in Christ's death might seem to lead to the conclusion that Christians have participated in his resurrection. But Paul seems to take care to say that 'we shall ... be united with him in a resurrection like his' (Rom. 6.5) and that 'we shall also live with him' (6.8), even though in a certain sense the Christian already 'lives' to God (6.11). The resurrection is also clearly described as future in I Cor. 6.14; 15.22 ('will be made alive'); Phil. 3.11. Similarly, the Kingdom of God (a term not often used by Paul) will be inherited in the future (I Cor. 6.9f.). Davies points out that in Col. 1:13 he takes the transfer to 'the kingdom of his beloved Son' to have taken place."

This type of complexity, with apocalyptic elements mingled with some obvious gnostic and "mysteries" ideas, as is present in his arguments and writings, must be accounted for, while we should be wary of constructing an "authentic" Pauline theology, with present known writings. If we accept Sanders' argument that in Judaism we are saved by the grace of God and we stay within this covenant of grace, if we attempt to live by the law and repent our shortcomings, then it seems that Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon and Job did not need an external saviour. Paul's problem lies with the Gentiles and his difficulties lie in two directions. He had to handle and tame the interpretation of the covenant as having a historical tribal/national/cultural connotation, in addition to law/repentance/ obedience/grace aspects. David was a Jewish king as well as a classical son of God and an example of a kingly representative of God. National and cultural connotations were present and co-determinant with that of God's grace to everyone who submits to his Spirit, love and grace and live accordingly. Now add to this a host of apocalyptic

expectations, some of which Paul had a shared belief in, but the package in general as a new version of Jewish religion, would not be easy to sell to Pagans. How does one get the Jewishness out of the system without insulting the Jews and “Godfearers”? How can you explain the equation of faith, grace, love, law, repentance, obedience, with reference to Jehovah/Jesus/Christ plus a variety of apocalyptic expectations, to the satisfaction of Jews and Gentiles within many different cultures? For some enlightened/disillusioned diaspora Jews/Godfearers, these complex relationships did not seem a serious problem, but for those who do not want to understand the dual nature of the “covenant” and think that Jewishness as more important than righteousness or even God’s universal Lordship and even equate them with one another, it is a different story. The wise, such as James, the brother of Jesus, understood the problem and conceded that the universal kingdom of God is more important than ethnic and cultural claims. Obviously many of the Jewish Jesus followers did not, or did not want to, understand this distinction. Other gentile Christian groups would not accept the Jewish cultic-historical dominance in their new religion and Jesus had to become the “Cosmic Christ”, an equal partner in a new Godly-Trinity, through whom they rearranged the Jewish history into a new, more neutral and universal religion.

Furthermore, James, Peter and the like-minded Jews, did not need a sacrificial saviour but a wise prophet, rabbi and role model for a direct relationship with God, who was a heavenly messenger or messiah. The Gentiles, on the other hand, were badly in need of a new and real, moral example of their universal hero, god-man and prototype of the dying and resurrected God, with whom they can identify as the ideal of human excellence. In the “outer mysteries”, or in the legendary, mythical narrative, he is the god-man, saviour and revealer from the gods, while in the secret teachings; they are archetypal, universal role models. The spiritual mature ones must follow this example of “dying to this world”, discovering the godly Spirit within, then they are regarded as being “resurrected” into the spiritual Kingdom just as Jesus taught and modelled for them. This doing part, following their inner destiny on the pattern and life of their “saviour”, consists of the “inner mysteries”, taught only to those that are spiritually advanced enough to understand and want to make the journey.

Paul's new brand of the "mysteries" was successfully taken further by the Church, but they somehow got rid of the real inner mysteries which Paul and his gnostics followers kept on teaching until they were "conquered" by the Constantine Church.

That Paul used metaphysical and mythological constructs in some of his arguments are there for anyone to see, but to the degree that he himself was influenced by them beyond argumentative instruments of thought, is another topic. That the sacrificial lore of Jesus was used as an introductory "guilt purging" device to help make their spiritual transition to a more mature religion, is valid and necessary for all converts. Every single one of them, including the Jews, came from an ethnic-national-cultic-sacrificial religion and was attracted to this more rational and real-life, ethical-moral-compassionate, equalitarian and experiential religion. That is why Paul emphasised the "once only historical and totally sufficient-sacrifice" aspect in his arguments, to get this primitive partly economic rite permanently behind their backs. It is an effective argument to get and keep them out of the sacrificial-cultic systems whose income was largely derived from god-brokering, mediation and sacrificial "atonement" practices and would not easily give up. They wanted their customers back to survive and therefore at any cost.

From a spiritual perspective, it is of course true that Jesus did die for, and because of, the sins of humanity in the context that he lived and taught the Kingdom of God, until the truth was unbearable to the Temple management and its associated theologians, who then killed him with the help of the political powers. The latter, who themselves had no interest in Truth but only in total political submission, while the rest of humanity stood by. Jesus was sacrificed for his integrity and the truths he held dear because he got them directly from God, and not through the god-brokers. He prove to us the importance of his message and example but most importantly, that he regard death as only a transition to perhaps something better. Paul's theological emphasis is definitely not on the Temple cult and not so much on the historical Jesus as on the mystical death-resurrection-rebirth of the spiritual Christ to be duplicated in all mature strivers.

This crucifixion of the messenger with the “wrong” message did surely and sadly happen over and over again in history, and will also happen today when we will be the aggressors or “sinners” for the same reasons; still not understanding the concept of the Kingdom of God that must manifest through us and not by supernatural intervention. We, in effect, have learned nothing more since Jesus brought us the message of the Kingdom within. Instead we still believe it is God’s function to “sort everything out” for our benefit somewhere in the future.

This brings us to the silly dogma that humanity can be saved by “faith alone”, simplistically and without any intellectual, moral or physical input. This rhetoric assures us that Jesus died for us and therefore all is well now and till eternity. Sit back and enjoy, but you might have a better deal here and hereafter, if you are not a bad person. Without proper analyses and regard to context, Paul’s arguments were used to create a theological Utopia, based upon simplistic usage of texts. This results in propagating that the spiritual fruits of faith will only be realized in the “next life”. We do not have any necessary responsibilities or any necessary imperatives regarding this present life because, as one religious minister told me, our salvation will then depend on works and not on grace! The ambiguity and oscillating emphasis on the merits of spiritual fruits that the main Churches preach, while dogmatically insisting on “faith and grace alone” represents, and is related to, some confusing arguments and standpoints also found in the Bible, but the main culprit is the amplification of them into rigged theological dogma over time. No choice is allowed (Church dogma is infallible), and no effort is made, to construct consistent and logical arguments that couples concepts such as creation and God, the human condition, intellectual and moral responsibility to religious faith, the merits and pitfalls of revelation, repentance, sacrifices, mediation, grace and salvation to accommodate a 21st. century understanding. Instead, the present dogma is deduced from comparing similar concepts, in various Biblical texts that represent various theologies in ancient times, and then constructed in a “one only true answer” for then, now and forever.

In Paul's time, religious variety challenged the many different groups and debates the popular pastime. There will always be people who base their personal and group theology on certain "important" or ideological aspects, while interpreting all other evidence through the lenses of their unique claim to fame. Surely, there were groups that wanted to make "works" the way to salvation. Especially ethnic and tribal lore in particular, was not needed in Paul's mission and he clearly had to fight this nonsense with all the arguments at his disposal, but that does not mean that we must now create from these arguments a theology where simple faith is the total answer and works do not count at all. The early gentile Church soon got the message from pagan philosophers that their "Mystery" was in effect not new in any important respect; they had to produce a unique feature and that seems to be salvation by faith alone. Therefore, Celsus' criticism, that at least certain Christian groups that he knew about made no effort to follow the example of their Master and behaved more like hooligans. However, we must not blame Paul for this misunderstanding. He never advocated cheap, fruitless salvation. If Luther had reasons to prefer this type of salvic solution, why must everyone else be forced, at the peril of scorning God's grace, to support simplistic opinions, which are deduced from a partial understanding of Paul's apologetic reasoning that does not make sense at all for many Christians.

The cornerstones of any decent civilization are social order, economic survival that again depends on ethical behaviour on the long run, and morality or compassion to enrich our lives, which specifically should be the domain of spirituality and religion. There can be no moral growth in a society where there is no order, food and shelter, and no ethical cooperation to build a better life for all. All three of these cornerstones, to at least a comfortable survival level, must precede spiritual development but then religion should start to take the lead in building a caring, moral ethos to stimulate proper human and spiritual growth in the interest of all. Faith and grace "alone" and that through a third party sacrifice, are counterproductive dogmas that should not, and cannot, be the pillar of any religion that must fight injustices, and strengthen the spiritual moral muscles of its adherents. This is a classic example of taking spiritual metaphor for literal truth. Spiritual people are expected to tackle the social

evils and global poverty and starvation, while being wary of not producing only more materialists. This requires balanced, intelligent and loving commitment that is coupled to strong internal motivation, which again only comes from serious personal, spiritual and rational convictions. We *must* manifest God's universal Kingdom on earth as Jesus did, except if our religion is only a social thing.

9. REVISITING THE MAIN SOTERIOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN TIME, WHILE ARGUING FOR A MORE VARIED AND INCLUSIVE SOTERIOLOGY, ALSO FOR MODERN CHRISTIANITY

In our journey through history, we saw that that man's main and ultimate concerns were death and salvation. Solomon in Ecclesiastes wanted to make us aware of the fact that if we search for salvation to procure immortality for us, it is wrong, empty of merit and plain human vanity in disguise. Together with Jesus, in Thomas, he said that the earnest and truthful search for God is important and not the fruits of the search. Leave the fruits of your search to God, says Jesus, while you must "continue seeking until you find" for God and his truths and, "When he finds he will become troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will be astonished, and he will rule over the All." (Thomas: 2) Through this seeking process, God will reveal His truths and guide you. The only belief you need is that God exists and the need to acknowledge the human urge to seek Its guidance and assurance. Therefore, any soteriological plan that includes many "necessary" beliefs, must be regarded with caution. For instance, if you have to "believe" in x, y and z, or "work" for a, b, and c, in order to obtain grace, they are all examples of "attained" or "traded" salvation to ensure our immortality and fall into the group of merits for salvation. Instead, we must seek God and his Truths; while somehow, as a result of this search we begin to experience a sensitivity for justice and a feeling of compassion, which develop into inner habit. We start to grow morally into caring and mature human beings with an inner conviction that we are a part of a all embracing Force and will always be. Our fear of

death subsides and our perspective on life broadens and become more inclusive. Spiritual pilgrims, who only seek God and his Truths, across all cultures and times have shared these experiences and insights.

We will use as basic categories of religious systems, Joseph Campbell's (1996:2) distinction of "religions of address", for those that insist that you have to belong to a certain group and believe in certain things or happenings and/or that you must do certain "group things" as "the way" to salvation. The second group, which is more often also just a more mature phase in spiritual development, is "religions of identity", where you must discover your own hidden potentialities and look for God yourself and usually experience His presence in the inward search. Keep in mind that as with the Mysteries, and shared by Jesus and Paul, the expectation is that the first should eventually develop into the second in time, governed only by the seriousness of your own spiritual quest and the personal maturity needed for this last lonely, unmediated phase.

9.1 God, Creation and Cosmos

The aspects that make up a soteriological system are the nature of God, the human condition, creation and cosmos as well as their interdependency. We will start off with Creation and cosmos, which will already give us clues to theories of God and man. Intuitively most of humankind feels there must be a purpose to life and that there seem to be a Power that supplied a blueprint, as well as the rules for creating this wondrous cosmos. The odd, persistent "blind chance" believers will never be able to prove their theories or supply final scientific explanations of what was before and what happened during, and just after, the Big Bang and for what scientific reasons they claim a better theory than that of "design". They may and must, criticize any superstitious, irrational and exclusive faith statements from the Designer belief group. Furthermore, in this belief group, only the Designer will have the answers to all the questions. If the Designer, however, made this secret information available by "divine revelation" to a very special "reliable source" and was taken up in the Bible or any other "holy book", then we would not have

needed science and the answers would have been there for everybody to know. The fact is, it is not yet revealed, we will have to use science and logic to unravel life's mysteries ourselves, and will then in any case, know only partly. Only God knows all and we must learn what we can and what is necessary, while we remain in humble awe. This is the approximate position of Aristotle, Confucius, Socrates, Einstein and most Deists.

Other cultures, like those ancient Sumerians, Syrians, Chaldeans, and Egyptians, and of special interest to us, the Babylonians, had a cosmogony known as "Enuma Elish", which corresponds to that of Genesis in all of the seven-day creative activities, which is as old, if not older, than that of our tradition. (Errico, 1993:15) Plato also had his myth, which he called "a likely story" and so had the so-called, Gnostics groups. Why did they indulge in this metaphysical speculation? The reason seems to lie in the production of a story to teach the children their belief in God and his creation, in a likely story, so that it could make sense to them, without posing it as science, and which could start them off on their spiritual journey of awe and wonder. These stories constitute the outer mysteries for the young and not yet "ripe", as Jesus would put it. It is a teaching tool for the young that will be followed up later by other legends and parables, all of which needed to be memorized and discussed according to age group and insight. It was never meant to be either history or science. It is a story that conveyed certain basic beliefs as well as having hidden within them the esoteric teachings for the "elect" or "blessedly ripe ones"; the keys to divine knowledge or gnosis, as the messages for the "spiritual athletes" as Krishna and Paul have called them. The point to understand is that only the intellectual and spiritual "babes" regarded them as literal history or science.

Insofar as the creation stories of Genesis want to teach us something different, other than those of the rest of the Middle Eastern ones, says Errico (1993:16), it is that God is the centre of the creation and that "every thing that He created was good". We have seen that Plato agrees with the writer of Genesis that the creation was good, but he tried to explain unforeseen natural happenings by the inherent and somewhat "unpredictable movement" and changes in the

materials that constitute the building bricks of creation. Plato knew that the Most High God “was past knowing” by man and that, his own “likely story”, is precisely that. Together with all other humble realistic philosophers and scientists over time, he admits his ignorance nevertheless; he used his myths to teach the non-scientific truths of human meaning-creation, as he saw it. As with God and His realm of the Forms, a lesser god will execute the plans as the Creator; so must man also use his mind to generate ideas and plans as the highest human endeavour, and then only can it manifest in physical actions; as above so below. At the highest human development level, our mind can partly merge with Mind and therefore, we can become a godly instrument of God in this world. Plato’s intellectual and spiritual efforts resulted in an improvement on the older Greek mythology, which he believed was perhaps suitable for adults but definitely not for children.

It is now becoming clear that Genesis was also a very important source of mystical training and that the “Lore of Creation” was a popular mystical secret “Mystery” since very early in the history of Judaism. It seems to couple Adam, Moses and Paul’s Cosmic Christ, in a special understanding of man’s spiritual development. The mysteries were taught in secret symbolism to guard against misrepresentation by the “outsiders” and then only interpreted to those who were ready or “ripe”, and only after proper initiation into the specific group. These teachings however, were based on logic and represented a spiritual philosophy. It seems that the mystics related our personal spiritual evolution to the creation sequence in Genesis, as a stepped developmental process.

Origen went so far as to say that any scripture that contains inconsistencies and is in opposition with logic and rationality was obviously intended for allegorical interpretation. This is of course always true of mythical and symbolic teachings and is a warning to those outsiders that consistently tried to interpret and ridicule the Mystery and Gnostic teachings. Most of the time, contempt of the gnostics and mysteries only proved the ignorance and arrogance of their attackers.

Therefore, all phantastic cosmological and apocalyptic visions, myths and beliefs can only be useful if they form the outer mysteries of a logical, spiritual inner teaching and cannot in themselves be posed as God's literal plans, revealed to a "very, very, special" individual or group. Apocalyptic "prophecies", can easily become, to my mind, a form of blasphemy, playing God. Moreover, if taught only as literal truths, while their esoteric messages are lost or unknown, it more often than not, make a mockery of God and spirituality in general and rather promotes superstition.

9.2 The Human Dilemma

Many in the time just after Jesus, could not accept that tragedy and suffering is God's will, or even that God allows it for higher or holistic reasons. The answers with which they battled, were varied but of utmost importance to their understanding of life and death. Either the wrong God (translates to somebody else's God, but mostly Jehovah as seen as a Jewish tribal god, was made the guilty party) made the mistake, or alternatively, some lower deity tried his hand at creating and made the mistakes (some Gnostics groups believed so). Or else, it must be the fault of man, represented by Adam and Eve (the literal interpretation of Genesis and wrongly attributed to Paul). Perhaps, God is punishing you or your group for your sins (early Judaism and all primitive pagan cults). Of course, it can be that what happens, is in the interest of the Whole rather than in the interest of the individual and individuals must accept that and discover what they must learn out of the occurrence on a personal and broader level (Stoic view). You would no doubt recognize many of these explanations because virtually all are represented in some Bible text. However, the one that made the status of official Christian dogma is the one that blames Adam and Eve because of the "primordial sin" syndrome. Let us first look at the other opinions of the human condition, before we have a new look at this Christian solution.

Most philosophers concluded that the "human animal" is distinguishable from the other animals through his distinctive and powerful mental capabilities. In addition, they can use their logic and reasoning capabilities to suppress or

override animalistic instincts and, lastly, their moral potentiality, which surpasses ethical cooperation and bargaining, to manifest in a kindness that transcends personal, instrumental interests that could even become a form of unconditional love. The first and second attributes make man the cleverest animal by far, but the last makes man fit to be in the presence of the gods, that is, if properly developed and lived. This “gnosis” was the uncommon, common knowledge of the ancient philosophers and hierophants of the Mysteries and Gnostics. This mysterious philosophy was also shared with most Wisdom traditions, through all spiritually developed nations, including Israel. Man has the capabilities to overcome his dominant survival instincts by intent, reason and praxis; driven by a mysterious spiritual yearning, we have the potential to become spiritual and moral beings in the likeness of the “heavenly” or spiritual Adam, and live as if “Christ” is within, as Paul described this experiential reality. This is not an easy way to salvation but it is man’s real destiny to be realised as he becomes properly human and thereby exhibiting a living example of the “image of God”. It is latently present in all of humankind and was taught, revealed and demonstrated to us by Jesus.

9.3 Another Possible Interpretation of the Genesis Myth

By revisiting the genesis story of Adam and Eve I want to offer a possible allegorical interpretation to show how present scientific knowledge and sentiments could be used as an inner, likely story of this text. This perspective on Genesis, can be called the educational interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve, and serve as a possible alternative to the “sin of the fathers” model. Bearing in mind that the purpose of myth and parable is that there must be room for other possible interpretations to allow for every individual’s capabilities and development phase. We can and must always return to the story at a later, more mature stage and extract new insights; this is my understanding of Genesis at this point in time.

God made man from the dust of the earth and breathed the Spirit of life into him. He also said that he made man after his image and likeness and because He is Spirit the “likeness” refers to our own spirituality and not the earthly

body. He did not want any more angels but autonomous, self-responsible creatures. They must be his representatives in the material realm and must rule wisely over his creation. Therefore, although we share in an animalistic biology and instincts, He gave us a much larger capacity to reason and the unique innate potential to develop unselfish love and compassion for all of his creation. Consequently, we are able to control our instincts and to act in the best interest of others while sometimes ignoring our own interests. This potential for moral behaviour, or unconditional love and compassion, signals to us the presence of His Spirit within. Guided by the Spirit and equipped with a larger intellect, reason and logic, we should firstly rule over our own instincts and selfish survival mechanisms and, secondly, we must *become* His intellectual and spiritual representatives, as well as co-creators on earth; bestowing good gifts of love and compassion on His behalf, and to the benefit of all of His creation.

Adam and Eve were potentially fully equipped for this responsibility, but were still in the childhood stage of their lives, where it is normal to live carelessly within total paternal care. They could eat from all the trees in the garden except two, the tree of life and the tree of wisdom, because they were not yet ready to understand the full implication of the fruit of these two trees. God therefore warned them not to eat from the tree of knowledge or else they would die. Knowledge of this profound nature could be very detrimental and spiritually even fatal, that is, if it could not be assimilated into a mature and ready mind.

He purposefully made for man an equal partner and ordained that they should be one, because neither the feminine nor the masculine principle is sufficient unto itself, a mature and fully realised human being needs both modalities to be fully human. Note that they were nude, but not self-conscious about it. This is indicative of the pre-puberty stage (Gen 2:25) and that they were created equal. (Gen 2:18.) The young couple soon reached puberty and early adolescence and started to doubt the wisdom of their father. In consultation with the snake, representing earthly wisdom in this case, it “came out” that the threat was overstated and only figuratively meant, that it could be a good thing

to know as much as your parents; then you are a grown up and can be your own boss. Eve, being the female, matured first and was aware of these temptations before Adam. She convinced him of the benefits of acquiring the necessary knowledge early in life, contrary to the advice of the father, who she thought, “treated them like children”.

Having partaken of the forbidden fruits, their eyes opened and they realised they were naked and that they now were young adults who have defied the will of their strict and just father. The combination of immaturity and incomprehensibility of some of “the facts of life” resulted in self-consciousness as well as guilt feelings, while fear worsened their dilemma. After a couple of questions God saw that they had already and prematurely passed over into another state of consciousness and he knew immediately what the problem was. In confronting them with their impatience and disobedience, they both tried to put the blame on others except themselves, which is typical of immaturity or “unripeness” as Jesus would have put it; they were not truly ready to accept total personal responsibility yet.

They were duly tried, found guilty and assigned to normal human life, with all its uncertainties, challenges, tribulations and responsibilities. Life is not easy in any case, but it will now be more difficult because of their immaturity and arrogance - indicative of the resultant incomplete assimilation of knowledge - and therefore lack of wisdom, which could have been a tremendous help, if the correct procedures and timing were adhered to. At least man is now more like God in the respect that he is able to know everything necessary and still have the Spirit to guide him, if only, he would heed Its call.

“Then the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us, to know good and evil; lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever;” (Gen 3:22) he was sent out of the garden. Man now, has the divine knowledge to know good from evil or, as Jesus would put it, they can discriminate between ripe and unripe, and it would be expected of them to grow spiritually and morally. Unfortunately they will now have to earn their keep and make the best of life as adults. In order to ensure that they do not

again indulge in the premature eating of the tree of life and death, they had to get out of the Garden and were left to the mercy of their own developing spirituality to learn and realise the facts of life and death. The consequences of knowing the “hidden gnosis” too soon, which instead must come through the process of seeking communion with God, will spoil them irrevocably, retarding development and, who knows, it might even be fatal in a sense, resulting in unproductive security. However, it will definitely rob them of the wonderful satisfaction of accepting the challenge of personal development and co-responsibility with God in this life, and to fully develop into mature spiritual human beings. This gnosis, the fact that they already possess an immortal Spirit, by means of sharing in the Spirit of God, can be either detrimental or can be a wonderfully liberating experience, depending on our level of spiritual maturity. It is only valuable at the right stage. Through discovering and developing their own spirituality and sharing in the restoration of the Kingdom of God by serving their Father, through helping others in their own inescapable human search for meaning, is “The Way” back to Eden and the Father’s house.

This type of interpretation, I am convinced, was known to the ancient philosophers and to the hierophants of the worthwhile Mysteries as well. It is my guess that this type of interpretation also formed the core of the Jewish Mystery called “The Lore of Creation”. They expected of every mature person, initiated into the mystery religions and gnostic groups, to explore their own spirituality and even create their own unique and personal myth to represent their own understanding of the spiritual truths behind the group’s myths, legends and parables.

9.4 The Process of Salvation

The Jews knew that man had good and evil inclinations and that they could be controlled by rational means. Basing our life on a keen sense of justice, and through spiritual development, we will mature and can live a moral life. They also knew that God is slow to anger; knows their limitations and their hearts; is full of mercy and will grant them grace if they seek Him with the right

intentions. Why then would Paul develop a primordial sin construct, with a divine sacrificial tradition, from a Pharisaic background? In my opinion there are two possible answers.

The first one is related to his missionary strategy and, as discussed already, to get the Jews and Gentiles weaned from “sacrificial atonement” through a permanent “once and for all” special sacrifice. Secondly, it can be his construct for a fresh and innovative Mystery. He created his own mythological outer mystery of the universal hero and saviour. In this story, Jesus went through all the phases of the mystery plot. He rebelled against the injustice of his culture, received illumination and guidance from heavenly powers (the Holy Spirit) at his baptism. He battled with his own “lower soul” or ego/self (temptation story) as well as the earthly enemies of Truth (cultic and ethnic religions and power mongers in all spheres). In Gethsemane, Jesus (Matt.26:26, 38, 45) finally said, “My soul is sorrowful even to death” and to his disciples, “Awake and pray, that you might not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is ready but the body is weak”. Note it is *you* that enter into temptation. It is not the devil dragging you in, as in some mythological constructs. Furthermore, the *spirit is ready*; it is his human ego or body that resists. He prayed intensively and only after the third time he received the gnosis that he must press on. “Behold the hour has come and the Son of man will be delivered into the hands of the sinners.” Armed with this gnosis, which he received through intensive prayer and meditation, he overcame his own ego and personal interests, accepted God’s will that he must persevere even if it results in his death, for the sake of entrenching the teaching of the Kingdom of God. All who saw and witnessed his radical act of conviction will recognise the integrity and potency of his message and obedience. Then, even the “spiritually unripe” might be startled into doing some thinking and would have received their wake-up call. He will always be remembered as the moral hero that taught and lived the Truth unwaveringly until the sinners (those who have cut themselves lose from God), and the evil worldly powers (meaning those “unripe” people, who live as if power and ego gratification represents the optimum in life), overcame him and crucified him as sacrifice for their personal and exclusive interests. He went down to the “underworld” to bring

the good news to those who were “asleep”, to “the living dead”, that they too can experience God’s mercy through getting “resurrected” into the real human life, the spiritual life and live in the Light.

He was vindicated by God through his “resurrection”; was “seen”, or his new spiritual presence was felt by some, as proof of this new life, and he went back to the Father, having now prepared “the way” for his followers. They must now become true disciples, because the same Spirit of “Christ” is also in them, and the following facts should be clear to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see, to those who are blessedly ripe. (i) You acknowledge the two opposing forces in yourself, one based on survival and personal gratification, the other on spirituality and morality, and realise that you can and, perhaps, are supposed to control, regulate and balance them, although it takes commitment and effort. (ii) You sense a growing mystical longing to develop the “good” within, are drawn to the moral teachings of a certain tradition; make a commitment and get baptized or initiated; you now start to follow the example of the moral hero of your chosen tradition or religion. (iii) You experience heavy interference and hindrance from your ego for the new way you want to follow (temptation experiences). This leads in steps to your final crisis of decision, your Gethsemane experience. You now either, leave “the way” and return to the “fleshly”, pleasure driven and materially dominated life, or you receive Help, Gnosis and Inspiration from your inner “Voice” or Spirit and decide to “die” to this material world and your overdeveloped ego so that you can be “born again” to your spiritual Self. This is the so-called “dark night of the soul”, where a final decision is forced on you by our inner voice, either to go all the way or quit and be your smart, casual self again. (iv) If you make your choice as your moral hero did, then you are now “twice born” or “reborn in the spirit” or “resurrected” from the condition called “the living dead”; you will from now on take on a new ruling principle, defined as a life where the Spirit of God directs our human life as the inborn, but now dominant and controlling “Spirit of Christ” or the “Heavenly Adam”. You have started on the last, most serious stage of a personal, and lonely spiritual quest, where you know that a mature relationship with God is not a “group thing”; it is a “one to One” confrontation, requiring “first hand” experiences and commitments and

no Mediator or Saviour is allowed to do “your work” for you. (v) You are still in this world but not of this world, you are progressively becoming “passers-by”, you strive for perfection and balance, you yearn to be united with the Universal One, the only God, the All, known by many Names in different cultures. You are now an open channel for the will of God through the dominance of the shared, universal Spirit active in, and working through you. (vi) Your spiritual growth deepens through unselfish meditation, prayer, which is now a personal, direct communication with God, resulting in a better understanding and an instinctive compulsion to work for the benefit of the Whole, by doing our own unique and specific work in the Universal Kingdom. Progressively or sometimes suddenly, you realise that you are an integral part of the Universal Reality, and therefore spiritually immortal, and will eventually be taken up in the vastness of the spiritual realm, called heaven, to be with our Extended Family in Eden. You have experienced mystical Unity, Oneness or Marriage with the Totality of Being or Total Reality, that Mystical Awe, that most of humankind call God.

All the elements of this Universal Mystery Philosophy were present in the life and teaching of Jesus and were only interpreted differently by different groups of Jesus followers, as well as by Paul and the Gnostic groups. If Paul had wanted to convert the Gentiles, he would have had no option other than to use this “new” Mystery to reach the minds and hearts of his prospects; combining it with whatever arguments that he might seem fit at that stage and considering the status and orientation of the target group. Firstly one experience Jesus, as the new and historical, philosophical and moral hero described in the many “outer mysteries” making up the different Gospels. Then one recognises him as the universal or cosmic Christ, already present in Genesis as representing the spiritual Adam, heavenly Man or the Image of God and operationally one can call this power the Holy Spirit at work. Lastly, we take Jesus at his word that this power is present in all people, a gift from God and if you believe this and through own experience, this then becomes gnosis, an intuitive knowledge; you then share in the esoteric teaching or the “inner mysteries”. Why should this frighten any serious spiritual Pilgrim, or the Church?

If however, you want to be different and prove that your group is unique or alternatively, your only need is to belong to a large social club with shared ideals or perhaps, do not understand the principles of spiritual development; or for all these reasons plus some economic and political ones, you want to keep your group exclusive, then you will have to read myth and metaphor as history and literal fact. If however, you do realise that there can be but one God, sought by every serious spiritual Seeker, and that all Pilgrims long for a personal relationship with Him/Her/It, then you know that you will have to progress beyond the culture specific outer mysteries and the protective group phase to an authentic, personal mission of seeking Truth and Unity within this Awful Cosmic Reality, which in any case, is beyond human petty divisional constructs. This Ultimate Reality created us in a way that necessitates growth in time and certain genes are only switched on in certain progressions, combinations and sequences. It is therefore natural and necessary that understanding and growth follow firstly, a mythical, indirect and highly interpretive path, which will have various meanings even within different supportive groups, as was the case in Early Christianity. Unfortunately, Churches normally act more like conservative, coercive pressure groups functioning as Systems of absolute laws and dogmas, keeping their members spiritually dependent for their own selfish reasons. Instead, they should develop their members' spiritual potentiality, from proper understanding into practical morality, which are indispensable for their transition to their own authentic, first-hand and unmediated relationship with the divine Reality; mature, sensitive, compassionate, responsible and accountable, active in their own unique way within the universal, inclusive Kingdom of God.

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